

**FOLK TALES
OF
KERALA**

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K. JACOB



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GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Folklore in the different parts of India is a rich legacy for us. While researches in ancient and modern history have been directed in recent decades more to the succession of kings and political shifts not much notice has been paid to the culture, complex traditions and social beliefs of the common people. The sociologists have also to pay a good deal of attention to the customs and beliefs of the people and changes therein through the ages. They have rather neglected the study of folklore which is a reliable index to the background of the people. There has always been an easy mobility of folklore through pilgrimages, *melas* and fairs. The wandering minstrels *sadhus* and *fakirs* have also disseminated them. People of the North visiting the temples of the south and *vice versa* carry their folk-tales, songs, riddles and proverbs with them and there is an inconspicuous integration. The *dharma-salas*, inns and the *Chattis* (places where the pilgrims rest and intermingle) worked as the clearing house for the folk tales, traditional songs and riddles. That is why we find a somewhat common pattern in folk literature of different regions. The same type of folk tale will be found in Kashmir and in Kerala with slight regional variation. These stories were passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth before they came to be reduced to writing.

Folklorists have different approaches to the appreciation of folklore. Max Mueller has interpreted the common pattern in folk literature as evidence of nature-myths. Sir L. Gomme thought that a historical approach is the best for the study of folklore. But Frazer would rather encourage a commonsense approach and to him, old and popular folk literature is mutually interdependent and satisfies the basic curiosities and instincts of man. That folklore is a vital element in a living culture has been underlined in recent years by scholars like Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown.

It is unfortunate that the study of folklore in India is of very recent origin. This is all more regrettable because the

Panchatantra stories which had their origin in Bihar had spread through various channels almost throughout the world. As late as in 1859, T. Benfey had held that there is an unmistakable stamp of Indian origin in most of the fairy tales of Europe. The same stories with different twists or complexes have come back to us through Grimm and Aesop and the retold stories are greedily swallowed by our children. That India has neglected a proper study of the beautiful motifs of our folk tales is seen in the fact that the two large volumes of the dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend published by Messrs Funk and Wagnalls and Company of New York have given a very inadequate reference to India.

What is the secret of the fascination of the folk tales that the old, the young and children are kept enthralled by their recitals? The same story is often repeated but does not lose its interest. The secret is the satisfaction that our basic curiosity finds in the folk tales. The folk tales through phantasies, make-believe and complacent understanding help primitive man to satisfy his curiosity about the mysteries of the world and particularly the very many inexplicable phenomena of nature around him. We have an element of primitiveness in our mind in spite of the advancement of science around us. Even a scientist finds great delight in the fairy tales of the moon being attacked as the origin of the lunar eclipse. Through the folk tales man exercised his once-limited vision and somehow or other we would like to retain the limited vision even when we have grown up. The advancement in science can never replace the folk tales. On the other hand, folk tales have helped the scientific curiosity of men. In spite of the scientific explanation as to why earthquakes take place, the old, the young and children would still be delighted to be told that the world rests on the hood of a great snake and when the snake is tired with its weight, it shakes the hood and there is an earth-quake. Among the Mundas, an aboriginal tribe in Bihar, there is a wonderful explanation of the constellation Orion. The sword and belt of Orion, the Mundas imagined, form their appropriate likeness to the plough and plough-share which the supreme *Sing Bonga* God first shaped in the heavens and then taught people on earth

how to use the plough and the plough-share. It is further said in the Munda folk tale that while the *Sing Bonga* was shaping the plough and the plough-share with a chisel and a hammer he observed a dove hatching its eggs at a little distance. The *Sing Bonga* threw his hammer at the dove to bag the game. He missed his mark and the hammer went over the dove's head and hung on a tree. The hammer corresponds to the Pleiads which resemble a hammer. The Aldebaran is the dove and the other stars of the Hyades are the eggs of the dove. Any illiterate Munda boy will unmistakably point out these star groups.

Weather and climate have their own stories and are often connected with particular stages of the crops. The wet season and the hottest month are intimately associated with the ripening of crops or the blossoming of tress or the frequency of dust-storms and stories are woven round them. But nothing is more satisfying as a folk story than the explanation of the phases of the stars, moon and the sun. A Munda would point out the milky way as the *Gai Hora* i.e. the path of the cows. The *Sing Bonga* god leads his cows every day along this path-- the dusky path on the sky is due to the dust raised by the herd. The dust raised by the cows sends down the rains. A story of this type can never fail to sustain its interest in spite of all the scientific explanation of the astral bodies.

The 'why' and 'therefore' of the primitive mind tried to seek an answer in the surrounding animal and plant kingdom. Animals are grouped into different categories according to their intelligence and other habits. The fox is always sly while the cow is gentle. The lion and the tiger have a majestic air while the horse is swift, sleek and intelligent. The slow-going elephant does not forget its attendant nor does he forget a man that teases him. Monkeys are very close to man. The peacock is gay while the crow is shrewed. The tortoise is slow-going but sure-footed. The hare is swift but apt to laze on the road. The primitive mind has enough intelligence to decipher the inherent characteristics of the common animals he meets. Similarly, when he sees a large and shady peepal tree he naturally regards it as the abode of the sylvan god.

The thick jungle with its trees and foliage is known to be frequented by thieves and dacoits. Any solitary hut in the heart of the forest must be associated with someone unscrupulous or uncanny. These ideas are commonly woven into stories and through them the primitive mind seeks to satisfy the eternal why and how of the mind. Folk literature is often crude and even grotesque. The stories of the witches and the ogres come in this category. There is nothing to be surprised at that. They reflect the particular stage of the development of the human mind and also are a projection of the beliefs and fads of the mind. Scientific accuracy should never be looked for in folk tales although folk tales are very good reflex of the social developments of a particular time.

It is enough if the basic ideas regarding the animal and plant kingdom still satisfy that the donkey is dense or stupid and the snake typifies slyness and the fox is deceitful. These ideas repeated in ancient folk tales have stood the test of time and this would show that the primitive mind was not foolish or credulous. The very idea that the folk tales have woven man, nature, animal and plant creation together shows the great flight of imagination and singular development of mind. Introduction of moral lessons or any dogma was not done as an after-thought but came in as a very natural development.

The last source of the folk tales is human society itself. The elemental moorings that are at the root of human society are sought to be illustrated in folk tales. The day-to-day life of the common man finds its full depiction in the folk tales. Parental love, family happiness, children's adventurous habits, love and fear of the unknown, greed etc. are some of the usual themes of folk tales. The common man yearns for riches and comforts he cannot usually look for. He dreams of riches, princes, kingdoms etc. and finds satisfaction in stories and fantasy. Men love gossip and scandal. Women cannot keep secrets, children will love their parents, a mother-in-law will always think the daughter-in-law needs to be told what to do—these are some of the basic ideas that make up much of our daily life. The folk tales are woven round them and whether fantastic or with a moral undertone they only reflect the daily chores, tears and joys of the common man.

Unknowingly, the folklorists bring in the religious customs, beliefs, food habits, modes of dress, superstitions etc. and thereby leave a picture of the culture-complex of the region and its people. A tribal story does not picture a king riding a white big foaming horse followed by hundreds of other horsemen going for a *shikar*. In a tribal story the Raja will be found cutting the grass and bringing back a stack of it to feed his cows, but a folk tale more current in urban areas will have large palaces, liveried-servants, ministers and courtiers in the king's court. All this only means that the time and the venue of the origin of the stories are widely different. It is here that the sociologists and the anthropologists come in useful. As life is different in rural and urban areas or is chequered with goodness or badness in the world so is folk literature diversified, as it must be, being a replica of life.

It is a pity that these beautiful folk tales in India were almost on the point of disappearance when a few pioneers mostly consisting of foreign missionaries and European scholars looked into them and made compilations in different parts of India. Our present run of grandmothers know very little of them. The professional story-tellers who were very dearly sought after by the old and the young, not to speak of the children, have almost completely disappeared from India. The film industry and the film songs pose a definite threat to folklore.

The Sterling Publishers are to be congratulated for launching the project of publishing a compilation of 20 volumes consisting of the folk tales of different regions. The work has been entrusted to specially selected writers who have an intimate knowledge of their regions. The regional complex of the stories has been sought to be preserved as far as possible. The stories have an elemental involvement about them and they are such as are expected to appeal to the child and its parents. We expect the reader of the folk tales of the particular region to feel after reading the stories, that he has enjoyed a whiff of the air of that area. We want him to have an idea of how Kashmiri folks retire in wintry nights with the *Kangri* under the folds of their clothes to enjoy a gossip and how they enjoy their highly spiced meaty food. We want

him to appreciate the splash of the colours of the sari and the flower that are a must in Tamil Nadu. We want him to know the stories that are behind some of the famous temples in the South such as the Kanjeevaram temple. We want him to know the story regarding the construction of the famous Konarak temple. We want him to enjoy the stories of the heroes of Gujarat, Punjab and Rajasthan in their particular roles. We want the reader to have an idea of the peace and quiet of a hut in the lap of the Kumaon hills. We want the reader to enjoy some of the folk tales of Bengal and Bihar that have found wings in other parts of India and to appreciate the village life with its *Alpana* and *Bratas*. At the same time we want the reader to appreciate the customs and manners of the Santhals, Garos, and the other tribes inhabiting NEFA and Assam.

A set of twenty volumes of Folk Tales of the different regions of India by selected authors is an ambitious programme. Folk Tales have great impact in bringing in national integration of the country. A Keralite will see a pattern of familiarity while reading the folk tales of Bengal, Assam and Kashmir. Maharashtra and Orissa will come nearer to each other through ties of folk tales. The reader will feel that he is at one with his brother or sister elsewhere. A spread of knowledge of the social patterns of the different regions is a pre-requisite for national integration. It can be modestly claimed that this Folk Tales series will be of great help in that direction. The Publishers want to have a miniature India in these 20 volumes.

The authors have to be thanked for their interest in the work. I am sure that they have enjoyed the assignment. It is hoped the books will be found useful and interesting to the public. I have no hesitation in saying that the stories of the different areas do make out a miniature India. It is hoped the reader will enjoy the stories and will come to know more of the region and its people.

PREFACE

This little book is a collection of well-known folk tales of Kerala. They are of the Malayali community, which originally inhabited the western side of the Sahya Mountains (that is the southernmost portion of the Western Ghats). They are age-old stories handed down from generation to generation. I have heard most of them from old people.

It is likely that many of these stories are found, probably with slight variations, in other languages too, especially in other Dravidian languages. They may also be in vogue in other lands.

One common characteristic of these stories is their humour. Also some of them try to teach a weighty moral...in a delightful way. Thus in the story of the "Minister who saved money", the Rajah had to pay a heavy price because he employed a fool as his minister.

In some other stories, we are only given a picture of human folly, as in the case of "Mudiattei". In these also, we can enjoy the humour of the situation.

Most of the stories in Part one have been garnered from various people. The main source of the historical tales has been the famous "Garland of Traditions", (I-thihya-mala) by Sri Kottarathil Sankunni. The basis of the Othenan stories is the famous Vadakkan Pattukal (Northern Songs), of which I saw many prose renderings.

I hope that this little effort of mine will not altogether be wasted that the reading public will derive some pleasure from it.

K. Jacob

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**F O L K T A L E S
O F
K E R A L A**

1

EVEN AFTER HIS DEATH !

IN Kerala, in some communities the matriarchal system* prevailed, until recently.

There was once an uncle, in a family in Kerala who used the family property for the good of his own children, and neglected the rightful claimants, his nephews. They got no education, not even sufficient food. They just hated their uncle, and he knew it.

When he was about to die, he seemed to experience a change of heart. He called his nephews to his bedside and told them, "My dear boys, I am about to leave you. I feel very sad because I have not done my duty to you; I wish to do penance for my sin. You must do as I tell you. You must pass a stout stick through me from the bottom up to my throat, after my death. Do not cremate my body,

* This was the system of inheritance, among some groups, in the old days. According to this, a woman, when she married, did not become a member of her husband's family. She and her children continued to be members of her own family. The head of the family would be her eldest brother. He had control over all his sisters, children, and looked after the family property for their benefit. This led to trouble sometimes, as an uncle might try to use the property for the benefit of his own children, who really belonged to their mother's family and hence had a share only in their mother's property.

This system has now been almost completely replaced by '*Makkathayam*' i.e. inheritance from father to son.

but simply bury it,* after doing what I have told you. This will give peace to my soul."

After his death, the nephews did as they were told. They passed a big stick through his dead body before it was buried.

Hearing of their father's death his sons came to mourn for him. When the body was bathed, they saw what the nephews had done.

At once they called in the police. They came, and it was clear to them that the old man had been done to death by impaling. They arrested the nephews and charged them with the crime. It was known that there was no love lost between them and their uncle.

They were all found guilty and received severe punishment. How could anyone believe that they had only obeyed their uncle's orders !

Thus the uncle, even after his death, managed to do evil to his nephews.

* Both burial and cremation are in vogue in Kerala.

2

THE PENITENT

A MAN went to the priest to confess his sins, according to the rules of the church. The priest asked him what sins he had committed since his last confession.

He said : "Some time back, I took a rope which I saw lying on the road. I did not know whose it was."

"That does not matter very much," said the priest. "Is there anything else ? "

"Now that I come to think of it, I believe there was a cow at the other end of the rope."

"Oh, that is serious," said the priest. "What did you do ?" he asked.

"I sold the cow," said the man.

"Since you do not know who the owner is you can pay the money to the church," said the priest.

"But Father, I have spent the money," said the man.

"Then you must do penance," advised the priest. "I will prescribe suitable penance. Is there anything else ?"

"I took four *chuckrams* belonging to another," said the man.

"If you know from whom you took it, give it back to him," said the priest.

"I will give it to you, Father," said the penitent.

"I cannot take it," said the priest.

"If the owner does not take it from me, what shall I do ?," asked the man.

"In that case, you can keep it," said the priest.

Finally, the priest prescribed some penance, which he thought was adequate, and pronounced absolution for all the sins he had confessed.

The man went home and gave his wife four chuckrams. "These are for you," he said. "I had been to the church, and confessed my sins. The priest had a big kerchief on his shoulder, and in its corner he had tied these four chuckrams.* I cut the knot off, without his knowing it. I confessed the sin, and he said that I must return the money to its owner. If the owner did not want it, he said I could have it. So I offered this money to him, he being the owner. But he did not want it. So it is ours all right."

* A chuckram is an old Travancore coin, whose value was just a little above half an anna. Before the new decimal coinage came, a chuckram was worth nearly 7 pies. The present value may be said to be 3½ paise.

3

THE RAJAH AND THE MUSICIAN

ONCE upon a time, there was in Kerala, a Rajah who loved music, and tried to encourage that fine art. He would get together great musicians and arrange performances ; and he enjoyed attending them.

One day he decided to have a musical 'orgy' in his palace, to which great singers were invited. But he had made one stipulation. He said he was completely disgusted with the strange antics and gyrations of those who pretended to appreciate music. They would wag and shake their heads to such an extent that it was a wonder they did not come off unscrewed from their shoulders. They would beat time with their hands and feet. He concluded with a terrible threat : "If anyone indulges in such things, his head will be cut off."

A great musician began to sing. It was simply beautiful, but none in the audience dared move his hands or head or feet to the rhythm of the song, though it was very difficult to resist the temptation. But one of them, who was a great expert himself, was carried away by the loveliness of the cadences ; he could not contain himself any longer, and shouted : "I do not care a straw if I lose my head." So saying, he began to beat time with his hands and feet, and to make appropriate movements with his head, all to the rhythm of the music.

The Rajah was greatly pleased. Here was one who loved his art so much that he did not mind sacrificing his life for the sake of his love ! So he gave the man, in token of his appreciation, a "*Veerashrinkala*", a beautiful chain of honour.

4

THE TWO NEIGHBOURS

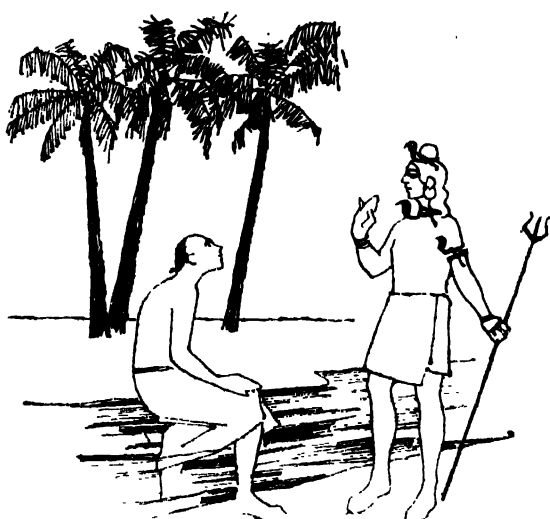
IN a village in Kerala, there were two men, Ramu and Govind, who were neighbours. Govind was very rich, while Ramu was very poor. Ramu's wife and children were often starving, but Govind's children were well-fed and plump. Ramu sometimes begged Govind to help him, but never got any aid. Govind was a hard-hearted man, who never parted with money if he could help it.

One day Ramu, in despair, decided to end it all in the river. He had no money to feed his family. He had been an ardent 'Siva-Bhaktha' (i.e. a worshipper of Siva) all his life, and was very regular in his prayers. In spite of all this, he had no food.

So he jumped into the river in order to drown himself. But when he sank in the water, he felt the terrible agony of suffocation, and came up. Then he saw Lord Siva before him. He came out of the water, and fell at the Lord's feet. The God took pity on him. He gave him three coconuts and told him, "You break these, wishing for whatever you want. You will get them." Ramu fell at the Lord's feet, thanked Him, and came away.

He broke a coconut, and wished for a fine house. And there arose a beautiful house, in the place where his wretched hut had stood.

Then he wished for a fine bit of paddy land, after breaking another coconut. And behold, he.



had a very rich piece of land, in which rice grew abundantly.

Next, he broke the last coconut, and wished for plenty of money. And there were thousands of rupees before him !

All this prosperity could not escape the envious eyes of his rich neighbour. Govind had never visited Ramu, but now he called on him, and asked him how he had got all his wealth. The latter did not hide anything. He told Govind the whole story.

Govind decided not to let this opportunity slip by. So he also prayed to Lord Siva, and jumped into the river. The God appeared, and gave him also three coconuts. He returned home with them, with the object of becoming a multi-millionaire. A number of friends also came, curious to see what would happen.

Just when he was about to break one coconut, a poor beggar entered the front yard, and began

to make a noise. He asked for food in a raucous voice, and Govind was much annoyed. So when he broke the coconut, he said to the beggar, "This is your head," a very common expression of annoyance among Malayalees. As soon as these words were spoken, he felt a change in his person. He had the beggar's ugly head on his shoulders. So also a small head, looking exactly like the beggar's, appeared at the tip of each of his fingers and toes !

He lost no time in breaking the next coconut, praying to Siva, "May all these heads disappear!" What happened then was indeed a worse calamity than before. All the heads disappeared, and he became a headless trunk. But his heart was functioning, and he was not dead, at least, not yet. In this dreadful plight, he turned a somersault on the floor, and luckily, his hand touched the last coconut. Lying on the floor, he took it up, and struck it on the ground, and broke it, while in his heart he prayed, "Let me have my own head back." So it was all right, and the status quo ante was restored.

The poor beggar left him then. Govind did not know that it was Lord Siva Himself who had come as a beggar, and that it was His power that had saved him, when he lost his head.

But no good came to Govind from those coconuts, except that he became an object of ridicule for everybody.

5

THE ABSENT MINDED SON-IN-LAW

A YOUNG man went to his mother-in-law's house, leaving his wife at home.

The mother-in-law received him with great joy, and made much of him, as is usual in our country. Nothing was too good for him.

Among the many delicate viands placed before him, he liked *kozhukkatta* best. This is a typical Malayali cake. It is round like a ball and is one or two inches in diameter. It is very tasty, being made of rice, with coconut and sugar inside.

The son-in-law liked it very much. He had never seen it before. He asked for its name and was told that it was a *kozhukkatta*.

He was sure that his wife could make it. She was a born cook, and had been well taught by her mother to make nice things. But she had never made him a *kozhukkatta*.

"Do you like it?", asked the mother-in-law. "Yes," he replied. "When you reach home, you ask my daughter to make it for you. She knows how to."

So, when he walked back home, he repeated to himself all the way, *kozhukkatta*, *kozhukkatta*. But unfortunately, he had to cross a narrow stream. He jumped across, saying, 'thitthey', which is a Malayali cry. He forgot 'kozhukkatta' and went on repeating the word 'thitthey' until he reached home.

When his wife greeted him, he said, "Do you know, your mother gave me thittthey cake. I liked it very much; your mother said that you know how to make it. Do make it now and let me have some to eat."

The girl stared. She had never heard of 'thittthey' as anything but an exclamation. She asked her husband what he meant. "I mean thittthey cake," he said. Your mother told me that you know how to make it. So do not pretend that you do not know."

But the wife pleaded ignorance, and the husband got angry! "You will not do what I say? Then I will make you. Take that!" he said, and gave her a few blows on her arms. The poor girl began to cry, saying, "You cruel beast! My arms have swellings like kozhukkattas on them. Look at them!"

"Oh! it is kozhukkatta, not 'thittthey'. I am sorry, please make some kozhukkattas."

So the wife made a few kozhukkattas and made her husband happy.

6

THE CLEVER GOLDSMITH

PONNAPPEN was a very clever goldsmith. He was clever not only in his art, but also as a thief. It was well known that wherever he touched gold, a little of it would stick to his itching palm.

There was one Viswan Namboodiri, who wanted to make a gold necklace for his daughter. Ponnappen was asked to do the work, and he promised to do his best. Knowing how clever Ponnappen was, the Namboodiri specially engaged a servant to watch over him. He did the work in an outhouse, at some distance from the Namboodiri's house, the latter's servant watching him all the time. In the evening he would leave, after giving the gold into the servant's hands. The latter would weigh it and make sure that there was not the slightest loss.

The work was finished. It was a lovely ornament. The Namboodiri was anxious to have a look at it, and ordered that it should be brought to him. So it was being taken to him, in a piece of silk, the goldsmith walking in front, the servant behind.

On the way to the Namboodiri's house, there was a brook, and they had to cross it. Unfortunately the necklace fell into the water, when they were crossing it. The goldsmith immediately jumped in and recovered the article, and went on to the Namboodiri's house.

Reaching the house, they put the ornament before the owner. He was very pleased, and gave the

goldsmith his remuneration, and a present. He also congratulated his servant, who had watched over the work so well, and gave him a present.

But their joy was shortlived. Two weeks later, it was found that the necklace had taken on a dirty grey colour. Nobody could understand how it had happened. They did not know what the goldsmith did on his way back. He had gone down into the brook again, and taken something out of it. It was the real gold ornament, while the one he presented to the owner was made of brass, so well polished as to look like gold. He had made it and hidden it in the water. When the real gold necklace fell into the brook, the goldsmith took out the brass ornament. It was so cleverly done that even the astute servant was deceived.

7

THE TWO DAUGHTERS

ONCE there was a poor *Kurava* (that is, a member of a hill tribe in Kerala), who had two daughters. The elder was married into a poor family. The younger one was lucky; her husband's family became rich, a few years after she was married. They had started some business and made a lot of money.

The father paid a visit to the elder girl's house. He really enjoyed that visit. The food there was what he had been accustomed to, i.e., tapioca and dried fish, with a little rice. At night he slept on the floor, on a rough mat, as he was used to. He returned very happy, and told his wife that "the girl was well-settled in life".

A few days later he went to the younger girl's house. It was a very big house, and he felt like a fish out of water. In the morning, he was given some tooth powder to clean his teeth. He was not used to such luxuries; thinking that it was something to be eaten, he swallowed it, and that caused some trouble in his throat.

The food was rich, and disagreed with him. He was not used to sitting on a chair, and it was irksome to him. After meals, there was the dessert, and that was too much for him. He had eaten his fill already and could not enjoy the sweets afterwards.

But the worst trouble came at night. He was shown into a room where there was a big cot. A mosquito curtain covered the whole cot, down to its

legs. He thought that he had to climb to the top, and sleep there. The getting up was not difficult, as he was used to climbing trees. But as he lay on the top, the curtain gave way, and he fell down into the cot. He had a nasty shock. But he was not hurt, as he had fallen on the thick mattress, and did not feel any pain. He slept till the morning. The next day his daughter came and saw what had happened. She was a little upset, but she managed to repair the curtain, without anybody knowing about it.

The man returned home, and bemoaned the fate of his younger daughter. "Poor girl!" he said, "She is in a bad way. The food there is simply uneatable. It upsets a fellow's stomach. I have not got over it yet. But one can bear everything. It is the somersault at night that I found impossible. I came away because I did not want to break my neck."

8

THE MINISTER WHO SAVED MONEY

ONCE upon a time, there ruled over a small state in Kerala, a Rajah named Pratapavarma. He had a barber whose name was Ayyappen, whom he liked very much. He had him often in his palace, and spent much time with him.

One day the Rajah told Ayyappen, "I will give you whatever you ask for. What do you desire to have?"

"My Lord, make me your Prime Minister. That is all I want," said the barber.

The Rajah kept a big army. It cost the state treasury a great deal, and the new minister wanted to save money. He thought it quite unnecessary to waste so much money on a useless set of idlers. As there was no war, there was nothing for the army to do.

"Let us have a fine set of dogs, to protect the state from enemies," he told the Rajah, and the latter agreed.

So he disbanded the army, and got together a large number of fierce dogs, which he thought would be enough to frighten away any army which dared to invade the land.

The Rajah of the neighbouring kingdom heard of this innovation in Pratapavarma's kingdom. He got together an army, and suddenly attacked his neighbour.

The minister immediately set free the dogs, and ordered them to face the enemy.

They did nothing of the kind. Rather, they faced each other, and fought their own battles. Thus, without striking a blow, the other Rajah captured the kingdom, and asked Pratapavarma to quit.

Minister Ayyappen was not in the least perturbed. "My Lord," he told the Rajah, "do not be down-hearted. We shall not be without a job. I have my old razor with me, and as for Your Highness, you can have my late father's razor. It is a very fine one. Such a good one you cannot get nowadays for love or money."

9

THE TWO SERVANTS

ONCE upon a time, there was a Rajah, who ruled over a part of Kerala. In ancient times, the whole land was parcelled out into small states. The Rajah had a large number of servants in his palace. Two of them, namely, Gopalan and Krishnan, had joined service at about the same time.

Years passed. Krishnan still remained a menial, while Gopalan was given promotion after promotion, and became an important palace official. Krishnan felt this was a piece of grievous injustice.

So one day, he very humbly approached the Rajah, and said to him, "My Lord, I have been faithfully serving Your Highness all these years. Gopalan also joined at the same time. He is now getting a much higher salary than what your humble servant is getting. I pray Your Highness to consider my case too."

"I will consider," said the Rajah, graciously. Just then, a bullock cart passed along the road. "You go and find out who are in that cart," said His Highness.

Krishnan ran to the road, and came back soon. "They are people from the south. Their names are Narayana Iyer and Lakshmi Ammal, and there is also a servant, named Chandu."

"Go and ask where they are going," Krishnan went again, asked them, and returned. "They are going to Kottayam," he informed the Rajah.

"Go and ask why they are going to Kottayam," said His Highness. So he went again, and asked them the purpose of their mission. "We are going

to attend a marriage ceremony," they said. Krishnan ran back and told the Rajah what they had said. The Rajah said, "Find out whose marriage it is." Krishnan ran again, and returned. "It is the marriage of the man's youngest brother," he said. "Go on and ask when they will return," said His Highness. Krishnan ran again, and came back. "They are returning next Saturday," he said.

Gopalan was away from the palace at that time. He came two hours later. Then also a bullock cart was passing along the road. The Rajah asked Gopalan to find out who were in it. He also called Krishnan to his side, and asked him to remain nearby. Gopalan ran to the road, and returned in five minutes.

"Who are they?", asked the Rajah. "May it please your Highness," said Gopalan, "they are people from Adoor; they are two Muslims, one Khadir, and his son Abdul." "You go and ask where they are going," said the Rajah.

"Your servant asked them that. They said that they were going to Quilon." "Go and find out why they are going to Quilon," said His Highness. "I asked them that also. They said that they had a case at the Rajah's court there."

"Did you ask them what the case was?", asked the Rajah.

"Yes, Your Highness. It is a civil case, involving three thousand rupees. It is against a debtor, one Mackar, who had borrowed the amount from Khadir, three years back."

The Rajah turned to Krishnan, and said, "Do you now see the difference between yourself and Gopalan? You had to run five times to get all the information I wanted. Gopalan went just once, and got even more information than you did."

Krishnan had to admit the truth of what the Rajah said.

10

THE BITER BIT

ONCE upon a time, there lived a burglar in a village in Kerala. He was very clever, and used to get into houses at night by stealth, and carry off things. One day he heard two people talking about a woman in a village nearby. Her name was Maria. She was well-known for her parsimonious ways. She had a son named Avaran, and a daughter named Sara. Poor Avaran could not get from her money to buy even a *beedi*. She was so tight-fisted.

What the burglar heard made him think a bit. 'That woman must have plenty of money with her,' one man was saying. 'Yes of course she never spends a pic. She must be hoarding it all,' said the other man. The burglar listened and, by careful inquiry, found out all about the location of the house etc., and decided to relieve the miserly woman of at least a part of her wealth. It was the right thing to do. It is bad for a woman's soul if she becomes a miser.

So he went one night, determined to steal the old woman's money. Getting up to the roof of the house, he began quietly to remove the thatching made of palm leaves.

The old lady heard a noise, and suspected that a thief was upon the roof of the house. She considered carefully what she should do. At last she hit upon a plan. She called out her son, who was fast

asleep, "Avaran, is our money-box safe up in the ceiling?"

The burglar heard these words, and was happy. He felt that his work had been made easy for him. He had only to jump on to the flat wooden ceiling, and carry off the box. He had feared that the old woman had dug a hole on the floor and hidden the box in it. It was very dark, but it would be easy to find the object of his search. So he jumped from the roof, to what he believed to be the ceiling.

The house had no ceiling, and the man had a nasty fall from the roof, onto the floor of the house, some twenty feet below. He injured himself rather badly. "What the devil do you mean by telling such lies, you dirty old hag?", he called out.

He was handed over to the police, and thus had some 'rest' for few months.

11

MUDIATTEI

A COUNTRY bumpkin had a goat, which he called by the name "Mudiattei". The meaning of the word is "Be ruined"; it can also mean, "Let me be ruined", depending on the context in which it is used. The name is apt, because the goat is a destructive animal, and eats up the tender shoots of plants.

One day, the goat was missing. The owner went about calling "Mudiattei", "Mudiattei". It was a strange cry and people must have thought him queer. But he was anxious to get his goat back.

He went to a house where a child lay dead. When the inmates were lamenting over their loss, the man called out "Mudiattei", thereby greatly irritating them. One of them called him and told him that he should behave more sensibly. "You must say some word of sympathy. You must ask, 'How did this sad thing happen? What a pity!' etc."

He went away, still calling his goat. On the way, he saw a house on fire. He went there, and began to speak words of sympathy: "How did this happen? What a pity, etc." Somebody there said, "You fool! Is this what you do when we are fighting a fire? You get some water, and put the fire out." So he joined them in that job.

Then he went from there, still calling his goat. He saw a potter, baking his pots over a big fire. He immediately got some water in a vessel and put

out the fire. The potter naturally was angry, as his pots were ruined. "What do you mean by this?", he asked. "Is this how you help me? You could take a look at my finished pots; I would not have objected if you tapped on them to see whether they are good. And then you could have offered me a price for at least one of them."

So the man went on his way, still calling for his goat. Then he happened to see a white man, a European, who was very bald, and had no hair on his head. Remembering the good potter's instructions, he gently tapped on the man's head, and asked him, "Will you sell this? What price do you want?" The irate gentleman called him a fool and returned his taps but not very gently!

12

THE MIRROR

ONCE upon a time a man got a small mirror from somewhere. It was an unknown thing in those days, and he treasured it as a marvellous object. Looking in the mirror, he saw the picture of his own father, who had died some years ago. Having never seen his own face, he thought that the face he saw in the mirror was that of his father whom he resembled.

He kept the precious mirror in his own box. Every morning, before going to his place of work; he would look in it. So also, when he returned in the evening, he would feel an overwhelming desire to see his father's face.

But an unforeseen trouble occurred. His wife saw him daily opening his box, and looking at something. She wondered what it was. So, one day, when he was away, she opened the box, and saw the mirror. She took it, and looked and saw the face of a good-looking woman!

So this was what her husband had kept carefully out of her sight ! It was a woman's picture, and she wondered who she was. The brazen old cat ! She hated anyone who came between a husband and a wife, and caused misery in families.

But what could she do? She decided to teach her husband a lesson. So that evening, she made no coffee for him. In those days, tea was not much used in Kerala.

Her husband came, and asked for his coffee. But his wife simply kept quiet. When her husband insisted, she said, "Go and get your coffee elsewhere."

"Where?" he asked.

"You know where—go to your new love. I will not prevent you. I will go to my mother's house."

"What the devil are you talking about?" asked the man.

"Now don't lose your temper. I found out things for myself. You thought no one would know."

"Now, for goodness sake, say something I can understand" said he.

"Oh! you don't understand me? Then tell me, whose picture are you keeping in your box?"

For a moment, the man could not speak for surprise. "It is no woman's picture. It is my father's."

"Oh! was your father a good-looking woman?" asked the wife, with intense scorn.

"Now, don't be coarse. My father was a man with a small beard like my own," said he.

"Oh! and you have his picture in your box?"

"Yes! I have. I will show it to you."

"I should like to see it."

"Then come," he said, and she followed him. He opened his box, and gave the mirror to her. She looked, and saw the woman's face.

"So, this is your father, is it?"

"Yes, can't you see?" he asked.

"I can see very well. See for yourself."

He looked, and saw two faces, one his father's and the other his wife's. She also looked, and saw her husband's face in it!

They were much puzzled. But after a few minutes they understood that the mirror was reflecting only their own faces.

The lady rejoiced over the precious object her husband had brought from somewhere. She felt happy and gave him a kiss.

13

THE LITTLE CHILD'S DILEMMA

"IF I tell the truth, father will kill mother; if I say nothing, he will eat dog's flesh." This is a common saying in Malayalam, to indicate a very difficult dilemma. The story of the origin of this saying goes as follows.

Ramu was a very ill-tempered sort of man, and usually came home drunk. His wife found her married life anything but a bed of roses. One afternoon, Ramu brought home some mutton, and asked his wife to make a nice curry of it for his evening meal. He then went out, and the woman went to the kitchen to bring a plate and a knife, leaving the piece of meat on the verandah.

When she returned, she saw that a dog had just finished eating the meat. She was terribly upset and afraid. She took a stone, and threw it at the dog, hitting it on the head. The animal fell dead.

She had an idea. She cut the dog to pieces, washed the meat, and made a nice curry of it. When her husband came home, she set it before him, with rice. Their little daughter was a witness to all this. She said, "If I tell the truth, father will kill mother; if I say nothing, he will eat dog's flesh."

Ramu was intrigued by the child's words. "What does she mean?" he asked his wife. The poor woman, trembling, told him the truth. Ramu, however, was in a good mood. He enjoyed the humour of the situation, and did not punish his wife. But he turned the incident to his advantage later on, and used to taunt his wife for attempting to make him eat dog's meat.

14

THE MAN WHO CAUGHT THE LEOPARD BY THE TAIL

THERE is a very well-known saying in Malayalam, about catching a leopard by the tail. When anyone is in a mess, from which he cannot extricate himself, he is said to have caught a leopard by the tail. This is based on the following story.

Once upon a time there was a clever merchant in a village in Kerala. He used to take his goods to a distant market, sell them there, and return to his own place, before nightfall. He was thus returning one afternoon when a terrible thing happened. A fierce leopard sprang at him from a nearby thicket, with every intention of making a meal of him. There was no chance of escape. But the merchant, with great presence of mind, caught hold of its tail, and began to run round it, as it tried to attack him. The animal could not get at him, because he was holding fast to the end of its long tail.

This strange circus went on for some time. The merchant had a purse full of money, tied to his waist, but in the struggle it got open, and a large number of coins fell on the ground.

A man came along that road, and saw what was going on. "What is this?" he asked the merchant. "Why do you go round the beast in this way?"

"Oh, can't you see?" said the merchant. "This is a magic leopard. It drops gold and silver when

you pull its tail. I got some. Have a try, if you like. But I must have what I earned."

The newcomer, who was a simpleton, jumped at the chance of making some easy money, and received the gift of the leopard's tail from the merchant, with thankfulness. The latter gathered up his rupees and gold coins, and quickly got away.

THE ELEPHANT

AN elephant is a very sagacious animal. There are a great many stories about them in Kerala.

A man was once caught in the forest by a wild elephant and its mate. It is not possible to run away from an elephant. Very few people know that an elephant can run at great speed. The man therefore ran up an 'anjili' tree. (The anjili is a variety of the Jack tree) with fruits which look much like the Jack fruit, only much smaller). He was safe among the branches of the tree.



But the elephant was equal to the occasion. It first tried to uproot the tree, but found the task beyond his strength. So he left its mate under the tree, to ensure that the man did not escape, and went to a stream nearby, and filled his trunk with water. Then it returned, and blew the water on the roots of the tree. This he did again and again.

The man knew that his fate was sealed. The tree would certainly fall, sooner or later, as it was not a very big one. He was now safe up the tree; but once it fell, he would be an easy prey to the terrible tusks of the elephant.

But necessity is the mother of invention. It was a matter of life and death for him. So he threw the ripe anjili fruits down, for the female elephant to eat. He threw them near the foot of the tree at first, but increased the distance, little by little. The female elephant could not resist the temptation. It ate the fruits and when the man saw that it was far enough, he quietly got down, and ran away.

16

UNCLE AND NEPHEW

OLD Ousep had made much money, but his only son Thoma caused him much anxiety. The latter preferred spending to saving. The old man was worried about his future.

One day old Ousep visited his brother-in-law, Ulahannan, who was a well-known miser. He would take his tea without milk and sugar. No beggar was ever allowed to open his gate. He had a lot of money, but he kept it all in a strong box.

Old Ousep was much impressed by the thrifty ways of his brother-in-law. "My dear brother," he said, "I will send my son, your nephew, here. He is a spendthrift. He must learn thrift from you."

Ulahannan was not very keen to have a guest in the house, but it was not possible for him to refuse his own nephew. It would not look well. So he agreed.

Thoma came, and his uncle, by precept and example, tried to teach him the principles of thrift. He was a willing pupil, and learnt everything he was taught. After about a month, one night, the old man got ready to say his prayers. Uncle and nephew always said their prayers together. Ulahannan put out the oil lamp, as no light was needed. After the prayers, the old man was just going to light the lamp when his nephew left the room. When the lamp was lighted, the boy came in.

"Where were you?" asked the old man. "Oh, uncle, I just went to dress," he replied.

"You went to dress! Why, you were dressed when you came in," said the uncle. "Yes, but when you put out the lamp I went to the other room and put off my dress," said the boy.

"Why?" asked the uncle.

"As it was dark when you put out the light, I thought I need not soil my clothes by keeping them on. Nobody could see me then," said the nephew.

The uncle was astonished. "You are a wonderful lad," he said. "There is no need of your staying here any more to learn thrift. You are now fit to teach me. I must take lessons from you."

So the nephew left, and the uncle gave him his blessing, and a hearty send-off.

17

THE WIFE WHO WOULD DIE WITH HER HUSBAND

CHACKO'S wife, Anna, who was young and pretty, told her husband, "I live only for you."

"What will you do if I die?" he asked.

"Oh, do not say such things, even in fun, dearest. If you die I will die with you. I will not live a moment longer," she said.

Chacko rejoiced in his heart at these words. That evening, when he met his friend Itty, he told the latter about it. "My wife loves me more than anything else," he said.

"What is your proof?" asked Itty.

"Oh, she says she would die with me if I die."

"You are a fool. You believe a woman's words. I would want better proof than that."

"What better proof?"

"Why, I would say that actions speak louder than words," said Itty.

"What action?" asked Chacko.

Itty whispered something in his ear. He laughed. "You are a sly fellow," said Chacko.

One day he bought a new dhotie and put it on. "It costs Rs. 10," he told Anna.

"Oh, I have a pain here, in the chest," he said, and laid himself down. "Oh, I am dying. Oh, my dearest love," he cried, and lay still. It looked a clear case of heart failure.

Poor Anna shed a few tears, and then said to herself.

"Anyhow he is dead. Why should I lose the new dhotie also? It is so costly a thing." So she removed it, and put an old one on him.

Suddenly Chacko got up and asked her, "Are you putting on the new dhotie in order to die with me?"

Thus the wife's action proved what her words were worth.

THE MISER CONVERTED

SANKARAN Nair believed in saving money, and disliked spending a pie, even for his barest needs. The members of his household found life very hard.

He had a young nephew who felt it more keenly than others. A young man has needs; and one has to appear respectable before others. But his uncle would not allow him money even to get a haircut, though in those days, one chuckram (i.e. 7 pies) was enough for the purpose. His hair grew so much that it covered both his ears. He looked almost like a mad man. His young friends found it an unending source of merriment. They did not know that his uncle was responsible for this peculiarity of his.

One day, when he was walking about in the compound, which was a very large one, he heard a noise of something falling. He found that it was a coconut. He took it, and went to the barber's house with it. He requested the barber to accept it in lieu of payment, and to cut his hair. The barber, who knew the uncle well, obliged the nephew, and took the coconut in lieu of one chuckram.

When the nephew reached home, the uncle saw him. "Who gave you money for this?" he asked, pointing to his head. "I took a coconut from the compound, when it fell from the tree," he said.

"Oh, what do you mean by such reckless behaviour?" asked the uncle. "We shall be ruined at this rate. Nowadays these boys have no sense of the

value of money," he said to himself. "That coconut would have fetched one chuckram at least."

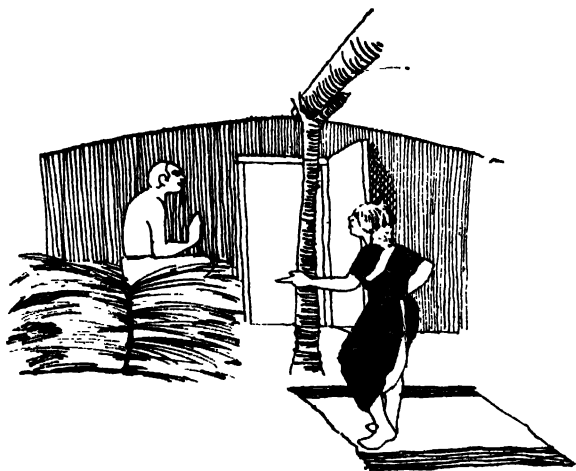
Rather sad at heart, he got into the house. A new line of thought occurred to him. "If these nephews of mine are wasting money like this, what on earth is the use of my stinting and denying myself of every luxury?" he thought to himself.

He called his nephew. When he came, he said: "Look here, if everything is going to rack and ruin like this, I am also going to contribute my share. I do not see why I shouldn't." So saying he opened his box, and took out a blanket which he had bought years ago, but never had dared to use for fear of spoiling it. "I am going to unfold this blanket and cover myself with it; see if I don't, you was-trel" he said, and laid himself upon his bed, and carried out his terrible resolution!

THE SON-IN-LAW

A YOUNG man, who belonged to a poor family, had the good fortune to marry a girl from a rich family. A day or two after the marriage, he was to visit his wife's house, in accordance with the custom in Kerala. So he made ready to go. His mother was a little nervous as to the manner her son would behave in the girl's house, and so gave him some good advice.

They had no chairs in their house. But in the bride's place, there would be chairs, or at least, stools and benches. So the mother said, "You must not sit on the floor, in your wife's house. You must always sit in a high place". "Yes, I will remember that", said the son.



Knowing her son's tendency to make foolish remarks, she added, "When you speak to them, you must speak only words of weight." "Oh, I will be very careful, never fear," said the young man.

When he reached his wife's place, he was received with great respect, and was offered a mat to sit on. But he remembered his mother's advice, and got upon a hay-stack.

"Come down, my son," called the mother-in-law. "Why are you sitting there?" she asked. She must have thought that something was seriously wrong with the young man.

"A hammer," replied the son-in-law; he would speak only 'weighty' words.

"Oh, what is it?" asked the astonished woman.

"An axe-head" said the young man.

"Axe-head?" asked the worried old lady.

"A grinding stone," said the young man.

The story does not say what happened after that; the reader is left to picture the consternation of the good people, who had such a treasure for a son-in-law.

THE WISE ELDER BROTHER

A HUNTER once caught a *veruku* (Civet cat), and took it to the house of an acquaintance, with the idea of offering it for sale. (Civet cats are much valued in Kerala, for medicinal purposes.) But the man was not at home; only his younger brother was there. "What have you in that wooden box?" asked the latter.

"Oh, it is only a *veruku*," said the hunter. "I have been wishing to get a feather of a *veruku* for a long time now. Please give me a feather now," said the young man.

"Please excuse me. I cannot pluck a feather now," said the hunter, and departed. Of course, the *veruku*, being a kind of cat, has no feathers. "These people have no idea of what a *veruku* is.

On his way back, he met the elder brother. "What have you in that box?" asked the latter. "Only a *veruku*," said the hunter. "I took it to your place." "Then why are you taking it back?", asked the man. "Why, your brother asked for a feather from its back. So I thought he didn't know what it was." "Oh, did he ask for a feather? The fool! He must have thought that it was a tortoise," said the elder brother.

"Oh, this gentleman seems to be even wiser than his brother," said the hunter to himself. "A *veruku* has at least fur on its back which can be said to resemble feathers. But a tortoise has neither fur nor feathers. I had better go my way, and sell the animal to someone who knows something about it."

29

THE SERVANT WHO ALWAYS SPOKE THE TRUTH

JOB was a servant boy. He had lost his job, and had come to the house of a rich man, seeking employment. They were in need of a servant and so they took him.

"Why were you sent away by your old master?" asked his new mistress. She was a stout old lady, with a squint eye.

"Oh, my master was all right, and liked me well enough. But my old mistress did not like me, because I always spoke the truth."

"What? It is so rare to get an honest servant nowadays. Do you mean to say that they sent you away, because you spoke the truth?"

"Yes. It is very true." said the boy.

"Well, you will find that things are different here. I am sure that I shall like you. I have had enough of rascally fellows here, who would never tell the truth."

So Job became the servant there, and for a time he was quite happy. Then the unexpected happened. One day he had to go to the market and wanted his food.

"Oh, squint-eyed Kochamma (madam), please give me food now," he said, The lady was very

angry. "You wicked rascal, what did you call me?" she asked.

"Why, that are you angry about?" asked he. "I spoke only the truth. You are squint-eyed, aren't you?"

It was quite true, but it was quite unpalatable to the good woman. She took a stout stick, and drove the boy out of the house.



22

THE WISE MEN OF KOTTAZHAM

THERE are many stories about the men of Kottazham. Here are two of them.

THE POND

In the land of Kottazham, there was a big mango tree, standing on the brink of a pond. There were a lot of mangoes on that tree.

Now in Kerala, mangoes are preserved in salt, and a very good curry is made with them which goes well with rice. The men of the place wanted to put all the mangocs on the tree in salt, but they had no jar large enough for the purpose. So one of them, more resourceful than the rest, made a suggestion. "Why not shake all the mangoes into the pond," he said, "and then put plenty of salt into the water?" They all thought it was a very happy suggestion, and agreed to carry it out. They climbed the tree, and shook the branches, and the mangoes fell into the water. Then they put a large quantity of salt into the pond.

Some weeks after this, they decided that it was time to take the mangoes out. They had been in salt water long enough.

So one of them tied a big jar around his neck, and jumped into the pond, with the idea of taking as many mangoes as he could. But the jar on his neck was soon full of water, and he was drowned.

Those who waited for him on the bank thought that he was taking more than his share. Otherwise, he should have come up. So another man jumped in, with his jar tied around his neck. When he also did not come up, yet another jumped in. Thus a good number of them were drowned that day.

23

THE NAMBOODIRI WHO TRAVELLED BY TRAIN

SOME hundred years ago, the Namboodiris of Kerala were a very conservative set of people. They would not send their children to learn English, the language of beef-eaters, and would not even use sugar. Though generally intelligent, they were very ignorant of modern conveniences.

A Namboodiri once travelled by train. He took a first class ticket and settled himself comfortably on a cushioned seat. He chewed betel leaves, and spat out the red juice through the window.

A European gentleman, who was sitting in the compartment just behind, happened to put his head outside for a minute, and caught the spittle right on his cheek. He looked carefully and noted who had done it. When the Namboodiri got out, he hit him hard on his cheek. The bewildered man looked hither and thither, but did not know where the blow came from.

He reached home, and his brother inquired whether he had a comfortable journey. "Oh yes, I travelled in the first class," he said. "Oh, did you? You must have enjoyed it," said the brother. "Oh, it is really very comfortable; the only drawback is that when you get out, a machine comes and hits you on the cheek," said the Namboodiri.

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

OLD Mariam was a wise woman, but she was worried about her son, Thoma. The trouble with him was that he would be silent when he ought to say at least a few words. But Thoma was very timid, and afraid that he would say the wrong thing.

The young man was about to go to his wife's house for the first time. If he didn't say anything to anyone there, what would they think? So his mother told him, "Look here my boy, you should not keep very silent at your wife's house. You must say something to your father-in-law at least."

"What can I say, mother?" he asked.

"Oh, ask him something in which he would be interested. You can think of something, can you not?" asked she.

"Oh, yes, I will do that, never fear," said Thoma.

When he reached his father-in-law's place, he was welcomed with great affection and respect. The arrival of a son-in-law is a great event in a Malayali home. A very fine meal was prepared for him, and they all sat together for lunch.

All this time, the young man was thinking of a suitable subject to talk about. Of course, he did answer the questions which were put to him. But he

wanted to put some questions himself to the old man. At last he found a subject which could not fail to grip. "Father, are you married?" he asked.

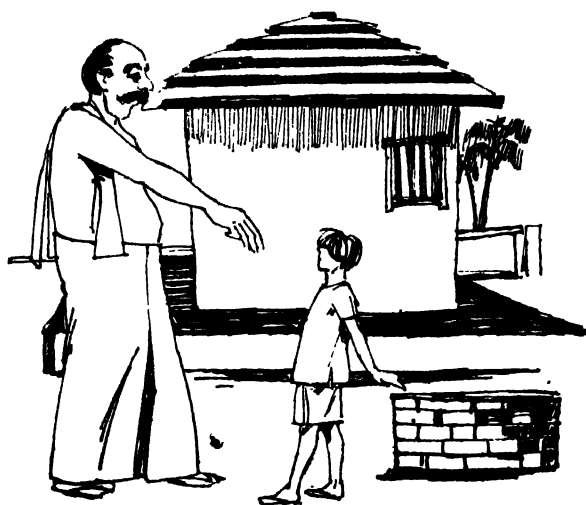
Wise people say that speech is silver, but silence is golden. But could we say that the son-in-law's words were as valuable as silver? No doubt his wife's people, by those words, were able to judge the worth of the treasure they had secured.

THE MAN IN THE WELL

IN a village in Kerala, lived a man named Outha, with his wife and little son, whose name was Johnny. Outha was in difficulties because he had borrowed money, and was unable to pay his creditors. One of them, named Ulahannan, gave him much trouble.

One day he and his son were alone in the house. His wife had gone on a visit somewhere. Outha saw Ulahannan opening the gate and entering the compound.

So he went to the back of the house, and was just getting down into a shallow dry well when his son asked him, "What are you doing, father?"



“I am getting down into the well. That man who is coming will ask you where I am. Don’t let him know,” said Outha.

Ulahannan came and entered the house, and tried to find out where Outha was. He saw the child and asked him, “Where is your father, my little man?”

“My father is not in the house. And he is not in the well,” said the child.

The words of the innocent little boy led the creditor to the right spot.

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THE GOD AYYAPPEN OF SABARIMALA

THE god Ayyappen of Sabarimala (i. e. hill of Sabari), is probably the most popular of the gods worshipped in Kerala. How he came to this land, and how he made his abode in the hill of Sabari are interesting stories.

Every year thousands of pilgrims go to the hill to worship the god there. All the way they cry, '*Saranam—Ayyappo*', that is, our trust is in thee, O Ayyappen. The road to the hill is infested with wild elephants, tigers, and leopards, and the devotees believe that they will all run away when they hear the cry, *Saranam Ayyappo*!

The story is as follows:

The Rajah of Madura, in South India, was in great trouble, owing to the illness of his beloved wife. The Rani was crying with pain, and the King did not know what to do. His army officers brought a man, said to be a very clever physician, to treat Her Highness, but his ministrations were of no avail. They only aggravated her suffering.

At last the physician said to the King, "My Lord, I have tried everything in my power. There is, however, one remedy which I know is infallible. But it is very hard to get."

"If it is available on the face of the earth, I will get it," said the Rajah.

"My Lord, it is the milk of leopard. If Her Highness drinks three *nazhis* of it, (24 oz.) she will be completely relieved of her pain," said the physician.

"Leopard's milk! You must be mad!" said the Rajah. "Even normally a leopard is a fierce animal. When it is confined and taking care of its new-born cubs, no one will dare approach it. It is impossible."

"What Your Highness says is perfectly true," said the physician. "That is why I said that the thing is very difficult to get. Can you not send some soldiers?"

"I don't think anyone would dare to go."

"But my Lord," said the physician, "people say that your commander-in-chief is a very resourceful man and that nothing is impossible for him. Why don't you entrust him with the job?"

The Rajah pondered. He had in his service a youth named Ayyappen, whom he had met by accident in a forest, while out hunting. He had been attracted by the young man's handsome features and noble mien and above all, by his wonderful skill with the bow and arrow. He took him into his service, and he had proved to be a marvellous warrior. He was always victorious, when he led the army. So he had been made Commander-in-Chief of all the King's forces. This had naturally roused the envy of the other army officers. Besides, he was a Malayali, and therefore alien. Madura is a part of the Tamil country.

The Rani's illness, and the physician's advice, were both a device of the army chiefs to get rid of Ayyappen whom they hated. Nobody knew who

he was. He had said that he was a Malayali, and that his father was the Lord of the Universe. They thought that was just a part of his arrogance.

The army chiefs, finding no other way to get rid of him, had approached the queen and sought her help. They told her to use her influence with the King to send away Ayyappen. "What can I do?" she asked them. "His Highness is very fond of the man. If I say anything, he will get angry," she said. "If Your Highness will do as we suggest, it will be all right," they said.

"Well, what do you suggest?" she asked.

"We want Your Highness to feign illness, and say that you are suffering from severe pain," they said.

"What good will that do?" she asked.

"We will send a physician, but Your Highness should say that his treatment is of no use, and pretend that the pain is worse."

The Rani did as they suggested. She feigned severe pain in the stomach. A physician (who really knew nothing of medicine) came and treated her. But she only cried the more, saying that the pain was unbearable. At last the King who was very much worried, asked the physician what was to be done. It was then that the physician advised him to get the milk of a leopard. The army chiefs hoped to send Ayyappen on this fool's errand. If the rash fellow agreed, he would surely meet his end.

But Ayyappen, when approached by the King, agreed to go. The King was very unwilling to send him, but his love for his Queen was greater than

his love for his Commander-in-Chief. Thus it was that Ayyappen had to go to the forest to get the milk of a leopard.

Ayyappen returned after a few days, riding on a tiger and driving a large number of leopards and their cubs before him! As they approached the capital, men and women fled. The Queen's illness also left her.

The King then knew that his Commander-in-Chief was not a mere human being. He was a very powerful god. The King prostrated himself before him, and asked for forgiveness. He prayed also that the wild animals should be driven off.

"Oh! you have done me no wrong," said Ayyappen. "But have no fear; I will send off these 'little dogs' of mine back to the forest. But I should also like to go to my own country. I know that your army officers do not like me. I shall be in Kerala, and there you can see me whenever you want."

So Ayyappen went to the Western Ghats and met the great Rishi Parasuraman there. The Rishi knew that Ayyappen was a god and prostrated himself before him, and prayed that he should take his abode on the hill of Sabari. "Sabari" was a woman Rishi who had met Sri Rama in his wanderings, on the hill named after her.

The god consented to this and took his abode on that hill. So it is that every year people go and worship him there.

THE PRIEST OF KADAMITOM (His early life)

THIS is the story of a priest who became a legend in his own time. He was born at Kadamittom, in north Travancore. His name was Poulouse. Early in his life his parents died, and he had no brothers to help him. So he was a lone waif thrown into this hard world.

The priest of the church at Kadamittom took him into his protection and treated him with great kindness.

He learnt Syriac, which was essential for becoming a priest. He was made a deacon, that is, the first step to a priestly career.

The old priest had a number of cows. When they were out grazing, one of them was seized by a tiger and carried off to the jungle. The priest himself, with Deacon Poulouse and a few armed friends, went after it. Not finding it they returned by night. But the deacon was missing. The old priest was very fond of him and was much grieved.

The deacon had wandered about and lost his way. He was caught by a band of robbers who took him to their den. They were cannibals and would have eaten him but for the intervention of their captain who felt some sympathy for the young man who had the ill-luck to be caught by them. "You must stay here with us," he said. "Do not try to escape if you want to live," he added.

The captain insisted that the deacon strip himself completely. Naked, he could not escape. The man was highly proficient in witchcraft, and he taught Deacon Poulose the art of black magic.

Twelve years passed. By this time, the deacon had become a trusted servant of the captain, but he felt homesick. He told the captain how he longed to see his master, the old priest. The captain was sympathetic. He said, "I cannot let you go. But if you can manage to escape eluding the guards, I will not prevent you."

The deacon took him at his word. By using witchcraft, he brought a heavy sleep on the guards who were watching his movements. He got out and tried to find the way to his old home. It was by no means an easy task. The guards, he knew, would wake up and pursue him after about two hours of sleep.

He walked the whole night, and came to an old woman's cottage. He was very hungry. But the old woman could not help him. She had no food in the house. "Haven't you got even a grain of rice?" asked the deacon. "A grain of rice? What is that for?" asked the old woman. "Bring that to me," said our hero. The old woman brought a grain of rice, and gave it to him. He put it into a pot, and filled the pot with water and boiled it. In a few minutes the pot was full of boiling rice! This was a feat of witchcraft, and both the deacon and the old woman appeased their hunger with the food thus provided.

The deacon proceeded to Kadamittom, after being told which way to go by the old woman. He reached the place when it was dusk. He went straight to the old priest who received him with

great affection. He had never hoped to see the young man again.

But he was not long left at peace. The robbers found out that the bird had flown, and pursued him. They came the next day to Kadamittom and entered the church there. The first to see them was the sexton who thought they were not human beings but devils. He ran to the priest and told him that the church was occupied by evil spirits. He and the deacon came rushing to the church. The deacon went in and asked them what they wanted.

"You are the person whom we want. We will carry you off now!" They made also some remarks about the folly of young men who tried to elude their vigilance.

But all of a sudden, they fell down as if dead. Such was the power of the deacon's magic. The old priest thought that they were all dead. "No, Father, they are not dead," said the deacon. "I shall wake them up." He did so, and they were all glad to leave the place.

Of course, all this was due to his magic, but he pretended that it was due to his divine gifts. The old priest was easily taken in, and so were many of the people round about the place.

So everybody was happy to see him consecrated as a full priest. He was no longer a deacon, but known as *Kadamittathachan*, that is, the Priest of Kadamittom. He used his powers always for the good of those who wanted his help, and in course of time became famous.

THE PRIEST AND KUNJAMON POTTI

KUNJAMON Potti was a 'witch-doctor', of no small reputation. He was conscious of his powers, and had an exaggerated notion of it. He often invited the priest of Kadamittom to his place, no doubt to show off his own proficiency. He had a high opinion of the priest, but thought himself superior to him.

One morning he saw the priest coming to his place in a country boat, without any oarsmen. It was indeed a queer sight, but the Potti knew that the priest had such power. Still he asked the latter, "Why did you not get any boatmen?" "Oh! I thought I would do without them," replied the priest.

They were great friends. They talked together for a long time. When evening came, the priest wanted to return home. The Potti requested him to stay for the night. But the priest said that he wanted to get back urgently. He came out and looked for his boat. It was nowhere to be seen!

Looking up, he saw the boat on the top of a very tall tree. It was not possible for him to climb up that tree. Of course, it was not beyond his powers to get it down, but he wanted to teach the Potti a lesson.

"Please do not put me into difficulties. I want to go today. Do get my boat down for me," he told the Potti.

“Oh! I cannot do that,” replied the Potti

“If you will not help, your women folk will,”
said the priest.

The horrified eyes of the Potti then saw the women of his family, delicately nurtured, coming out of the house, one by one, “in full undress”. The Potti learnt his lesson. He begged the priest to desist. “I will bring down the boat at once. Only, don’t put me to shame,” he said. He brought down the boat, with the help of his spirit-servants. The priest on his part made the women go back to the house, by using his power.

THE PRIEST AND THE YAKSHI

THERE was a Yakshi infesting the road between Trivandrum and Padmanabhapuram, in the south. When I say road, the reader might think of a big, broad path. It was really only a narrow foot path. This ran through a forest and people were afraid to go that way.

The Yakshi would appear as a beautiful maiden. But once a man was lured to follow her, she would change into a terrible being. She would look like a devil, and act like one—she would scream, and bite, and drink the man's blood, and then eat up his flesh.

Kadmittathu Kathanar (Priest) heard about this terrible Yakshi. He decided to get rid of the scourge. So he set out, and reached the place.

He walked along, though it was somewhat dark. Suddenly, he saw the Yakshi. She was so beautiful that he wondered whether his eyes deceived him.

She entered into conversation with him, and at last asked for a little lime, to eat her betel leaf with. The priest took a little lime on the tip of an iron nail and offered it to her.

The Yakshi would not take the lime at first. It was a magic nail, and once she touched it, she could not escape. But she had at last to take it. Such was the priest's power. By his magic he drove the nail into her head, and she became his slave.

The priest went along to the north and reached Kayamkulam, where his aunt lived. He went to

her house, and said "Auntie, do you want a servant girl? I have brought you one." The old lady was overjoyed. She was badly in need of a servant. She liked the girl very much and engaged her as her maid.

One of the first things the old lady did was to comb the hair of the girl, and make her look even prettier than she was. But she found the nail in her head and asked "What is this, my child? This looks like the the head of a nail. How did it come into your skull?"

"I don't know mother. It must have it got into my head by some accident."

"Anyhow, it has no business here," said the old lady, and pulled out the nail. And the girl was no more to be seen!

The poor woman had a bad shock. The priest was asleep at the time. When he woke up and came out, his aunt told him what had happened.

"Oh ! Has she gone? I must see about it," he said and went out. He pursued the Yakshi, who was fleeing to a palace of refuge. The priest followed her. Finally, they came to a place called Mannar, on the banks of the river Pamba. The Yakshi crossed over to the other side, where there was the Panayannar Kavu (forest). The priest found that there was no ferry boat available. So he cut a big banana leaf, and by his magical power, crossed the river on it!

He caught up with the Yakshi. She begged him to spare her life. She promised to live in that Kavu, and never to hurt anyone. The priest gave her permission. She is still believed to be there, and appear as a very beautiful girl on New Moon and Full Moon days. But she has kept her promise.

TALES OF THACHOLLY THENAN

THACHOLLY Thenan, or more correctly, Othenan was a great hero of olden days, known for his courage and prowess in war. He belonged to the Thachollil Manickoth family in the Kadathanad Taluk of North Malabar. He was trained to wield the sword and the spear from his very young days. Even as a boy he was known for his dignified and fearless behaviour.

When Othenan was a boy, an event occurred which illustrates the truth that 'the child is the father of the man'.

The Manickoth family had once been rich. But by Othenan's time, it had lost much of its wealth. Many of their landed properties were now in other people's hands. From one of the plots previously owned by them, the new owner's servant boy was gathering coconuts. As a gift to the original owners, the Manickoth family used to be given two coconuts when periodically the fruits were gathered.

Manickoth Uppatty Othenan's mother, went to collect the coconuts. But the servant boy refused to give any. So she took two from the heap already there. The servant got very angry, and threw a stem at her, injuring her on the abdomen. Blood trickled from the wound, but she felt the insult more than the pain.

When Othenan came back from school, this was the sight which greeted him.

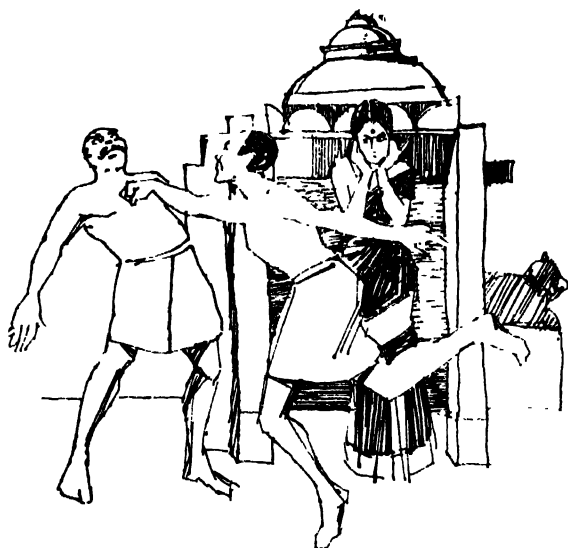
He ran to the compound, caught hold of the boy, and tied him up with cords. A crowd soon collected there. Hearing of the trouble, the servant boy's father came to the spot. He made his son beg forgiveness of Othenan. But the latter would have none of it. "It is my mother who should forgive," he said. "Let him go and fall at my mother's feet, and give her a number of coconuts."

While this was going on, Mathiloor Gurukkal, a grand old teacher respected by all happened to pass that way. He heard both sides and gave his decision in favour of Othenan. So the servant boy went and begged forgiveness of Uppatty Amma, Othenan's mother. He also put before her a number of coconuts as a propitiatory offering as Othenan had demanded.

CHEERUKUTTY GOES TO CHAMUNDI KAVU

OTHENAN was married to one Cheerukutty (also known as Kunki Amma) who was a fit mate for him. But she was, like most women, given to moods. One day, she felt like seeing 'Theyyatom', a kind of dance, which was held at Chamundi Kavu, a good distance from her home. She knew her husband would not give her permission. So when Othenan was away, she appealed to his elder brother, Komappan, to allow her to go to the festival. Komappan promised to talk to Othenan about the matter.

When Othenan came home, Komappan told him of his wife's wish and suggested that he should not refuse her.



But at Chamundi Kavu the company was a very mixed one, and Othenan did not like to expose his wife to their rudeness. Still, in order to please his brother, he agreed. To protect her, he asked his friend, Chappen, who was a brave soldier, to accompany her.

But what he feared did come to pass. Cheerukutty had to face the jeers of the roughs on the road. And at the Kavu itself, the rich Nairs who had come there used their tongues with cruel freedom, so much so that the poor lady began to cry.

She did not know that Othenan had followed her close behind. He could not bear to see his wife in tears. He jumped forward and knocked down the fellows who had insulted her. They fled in haste, from his avenging cudgel.

OTHENAN AND KUNJAN

KUNJAN was Othenan's younger brother, of whom he was very fond. One day, Othenan had to leave Kadathanad to go to Thululand, for further training in the art of war. As those were evil days and he had many enemies, he gave special orders to his people to take care of Kunjan. He spoke to his wife Cheerukutty also about it.

At that time, Kadathanad was ruled by the chief of Ariarkovil, called Thampuran (or prince). The chief hated Othenan. When Othenan was away he invited Kunjan to his palace. He could not refuse to go and no one thought that the Thampuran would do any harm to the boy. So Kunjan went to the chief's palace.

When the Thampuran met Kunjan, he greeted him affectionately. "I have recently built a tomb. I should like to show it to you," said he. So the boy went with him. He allowed Kunjan to enter the tomb so as to see the inside. As soon as he was inside, the Thampuran closed the door and locked him in. It was a dastardly thing to do, but the chief was that kind of man. His idea was to starve the boy to death.

Two days passed, and Kunjan had neither food nor water during that time. He felt that his end was near. As he lay there, he heard footsteps. Some instinct told him that it was his sister-in-law. "Is that not my sister?" he called out.

“My time has come. When my brother returns, he will avenge me.”

Cheeru immediately went to the temple of their tutelary goddess and prostrated herself before Her and prayed: “Oh Mother, Thou art our refuge and protector. May it please Thee to bring my husband here in 18 *naligas*, (i.e. about 7 hours). I will pave Thy floor with gold, if Thou wilt grant my request.”

That night, Othenan dreamt of someone standing before him and saying. “Go at once, if you want to save your little brother from the evil designs of the Thampuran.” Othenan did not take this seriously, but went on sleeping. But after a few minutes, he thought that someone had struck him hard. So he got up, and decided to go quickly to his native place. He reached the place within six hours. He went direct to his wife and heard from her the whole story. At once, he went to the tomb in which his brother was imprisoned. He called Kunjan by name. “Oh ! Is that not my brother?” exclaimed the boy. “Yes, I have come. Do stand away from the door,” he said, and with one kick he brought down the door and took his brother in his arms.

Then he took his sword and shield and went quickly to the Thampuran’s palace. That gentleman had the surprise of his life. It was only a short fight. Needless to say, the wicked Thampuran’s head soon rolled on the ground.

OTHENAN IN THE TOMB

AT Wynaad, not far from Othenan's place a warrior named Kelappen built a very strong fortress and terrorised the people around. It was well guarded by soldiers, and Kelappen's fame spread far and wide.

Othenan wanted to see the fort, but his elder brother, Komappen, warned him against such an undertaking. Still, he insisted on going and his brother finally had to agree. Othenan took with him his friend Chappen. They reached the fort, but the sentinels did not allow them to get in. Othenan, however, managed to enter by climbing a tree whose branches were overhanging into the fort. Chappen remained outside.

It was night. Othenan took a walk around and saw a small building which was locked. He felt very tired, and laid himself down on the front verandah. Very soon he was fast asleep. Somebody informed Kelappen about the strange visitor. Kelappen came and recognised Othenan, and ordered his servant to take away his sword.

Very quietly, without waking him up, they made him a prisoner. His hands and feet were put in irons and he was taken into the building, which was really a tomb. He was locked up in it, and the iron doors made fast. Othenan continued to sleep, unconscious of the fate which had overtaken him.

When he woke up, he found himself in utter darkness. He understood that he was in a tomb. What could he do? He prayed earnestly to Kavi-lama, his tutelary goddess who had never let him down.

Chappen waited a long time outside the fort. When Othenan did not return, he suspected that some misfortune had happened to him. He immediately returned to Kadathanad. After arranging for a thousand soldiers to go to Wynaad, he returned to the fort disguised as a Yogi. He managed to get in and meet Kelappen. The latter was very much impressed by the holy man. The Yogi had, from a casual talk with someone in the place, already found out what had happened to Othenan. He told Kelappen, "You have in your custody an evil fellow. I would advise you to hang him on a convenient date."

Nothing was more pleasing to Kelappen than this suggestion from the Yogi. "I will do so early tomorrow morning," he said.

The next day Othenan was led to the place of execution. The Yogi said, "I should like to see the fellow."

So Othenan saw his friend and felt relieved, for he knew that Chappen was a very resourceful man and would have something up his sleeve. Though his hands and feet were in chains, he was fearless. He asked for a little water to drink. The Yogi said that he should be allowed to have his last wish. The water was brought. The Yogi suggested that the prisoner's chains should be removed. There was no danger of his running away as he was held by four soldiers.

The chains were taken off. Then things happened very suddenly. Othenan made a jump, and managed to get a sword from some one. Both he and the Yogi fought fiercely, against tremendous odds. There was not much chance of escape. Othenan and Chappen decided to sell their lives as dearly as possible. They did not hear the war cries of the thousand soldiers who had by this time arrived at the fort from Kadathanad. They broke into the fort, and in the battle which ensued, Kelappen's soldiers were routed and Othenan had the pleasure of cutting down Kelappen with his own sword.

When they got out of the fort, Othenan expressed his heartfelt gratitude to his friend who at great risk to himself had saved his life

THE NAMBIAR'S DISCOMFITURE

OTHENAN had a niece whose name was Kunjikumba. She was very pretty and was happily married to one Chandu. She wanted to go to Kozhikode and see the Samoothiri (the ruling prince) there. (English writers call him the Zamorin). But there was a superstition in the Othenan family that if a girl of that family went so far south, it would be bad for them. So her husband and her mother-in-law advised her strongly against it. But Kunjikumba would not listen to reason. At last the head of the family, Komappen allowed her to go. Chappen and some others accompanied her.

As ill-luck would have it, one Othenan Nambiar of Kytheril House, who was a rich and powerful local chief, happened to see her during the journey. Stricken by her beauty, he decided to make her his wife. The poor girl, who was devoted to her husband, became distraught.

As the Nambiar had enough force with him to carry off the girl, Chappen saw that he had to comply with his demand. So he asked the man to come to the girl's family next Thursday, and to have the marriage celebrated there. He returned home with Kunjikumba without going to Kozhikode.

Delighted with his success, the Nambiar arrived at Thachollil house, with a retinue of Nairs, on the appointed day.

The great ceremony was conducted with all due pomp. The bride was brought in, beautifully dressed. Soon the function was over.

The bride and bridegroom met alone in their room. The Nambiar spoke kind words to his wife. "I will myself take you to the great prince next year," he said. Imagine his consternation when, instead of the beautiful and gentle Kunjikumba, he saw before him the doughty warrior, Othenan, dressed as the bride. "You dirty dog, I will teach you not to covet another man's wife. Here is your reward." So saying, Othenan drew his sword, and cut off the Nambiar's head without more ado.

Thus ended the matrimonial adventure of the Nambiar.

OTHENAN'S LAST FIGHT

KATHIROOR Gurukkal was a well-known master of the art of fencing. He had many followers, and could put a small army in the field, if it came to a fight. He was a little envious of Othenan, and he was sure that he himself was any day superior to him in the art of war. Gurukkal wanted a trial of strength between them ; in fact, he was itching for a fight.

An opportunity soon presented itself. Othenan was arranging to conduct a religious festival in his own place. A temporary shed was put up for the purpose with fine decorations. The Gurukkal came and looked at it, and made disparaging remarks about it. Othenan, however, did not want to make an issue of it, and tried to humour him. But unfortunately the Gurukkal was bent on a fight, and Othenan was no coward. The long and short of it was that they challenged each other, and fixed a day for the fight.

It was not to be a mere duel. There would be quite a good number of combatants on either side. The Gurukkal was a past master in the art of war, and was known for his skill with the sword. Othenan's people were not happy. When he went to bid farewell to his wife Cheeru, she looked unhappy. "Cheeru, my darling! Look up, do not worry. I shall win in this fight, I know," he said. But she would not be comforted. She felt a grim foreboding. Othenan tried to kiss her tears away. He left after kissing his little son also.

The day for the battle dawned bright and clear. Both parties got ready, and went to the '*Kalari*' (field) appointed for the fight.

Soon the fight began in good earnest. Othenan's friend Chappen and Gurukkal began a duel. It was a grim fight, but Chappen was no match for his opponent. Othenan, therefore, joined the fray.

Long and terrible was that fight between the two champions of the day. The people around held their breath. The Gurukkal was an expert, but so was Othenan. By clever footwork Othenan managed to trip up the Gurukkal and the latter fell down. In a moment Othenan's sword cut off the enemy's head and the fight was over.

After the victory Othenan's party walked back in triumph. But on the way he said, "Oh, I have forgotten my dagger. I left it at the *Kalari*. He soon walked back.

But a wicked Muslim, from his hiding place, fired a gun at him and sent a bullet through his forehead. The man was a friend of the vanquished warrior. But he did not escape. A friend of Othenan sent an arrow at him and killed him.

But Othenan fell down, and he knew that he was dying. His friends were in tears. But he said cheerful words to his elder brother "Brother, I am not going to die," he said. "It is only a slight wound." Komappa Kurup felt relieved. But it was only for a short time. Very soon Othenan was dying and they all could see it. Chappen and all the rest of them began to cry. Othenan said, "Don't cry; I have finished my work."

Then the agony of the parting came to him. He called his wife's name. But she was not there.

He called the name of Ambadi, his little son. "You must give my sword and shield to him", he told Chappen. Again he called his wife's name. "Cheeru, dearest, I shall see you no more. But no one should grieve for me. I have never brought shame on you," he said. Then he called on the name of his goddess, "Oh my Kavilamma! "...

Thus died one of the noblest and bravest sons of Kerala at the early age of thirty-two.

KAYAMKULAM KOCHUNNY

THERE is probably no one in Kerala who has not heard the name of Kayamkulam Kochunny. (Kayamkulam is a town in Central Travancore.) He was a famous robber, but was noted for his chivalry and charity to the poor. There are books about him and recently a film was made about his exploits. He is said to have lived a century and a half ago. In those days, there was no strong government in the land. Good roads were also rare. He belonged to a family well-known for its depredatory instincts. His father was himself a robber, and was given to thieving and law-breaking.

Kochunny also became a very clever thief. He was adept at burglary and highway robbery. He would rob only the rich and miserly people. If anyone showed him kindness, he would never forget it and would show his gratitude in some way. With his ill-gotten wealth he would help the poor and needy people very generously.

He was a Muslim born to very poor parents. After his father's death, he became a destitute and wandered about in search of employment. At a place called Evoor he got the help of a kind gentleman who not only gave him food but also secured for him a job as servant in a merchant's shop.

He was very faithful in his duties and pleased his master. He managed to learn "*Kalaripyttu*", i.e. the art of fencing. Nearby lived a Muslim master teaching this art but he refused to teach it to Kochunny for some reason best known to himself. Either he felt that the boy was dangerous or that he had no money to pay his fees.

But Kochunny mastered the art by stealth. He would go and watch, hiding in some place. But he was found out. The teacher questioned him, and found that he had learned more than his regular pupils. He was so pleased that he took Kochunny as his pupil.

His first exploit was saving his master from drowning. Once the latter was travelling by the backwaters, and was caught in a squall. The boatmen were unable to control the boat. But Kochunny took the oars and guided the small craft through the storm to a safe haven.

On another occasion, a man went to the merchant's house at night and asked for some *Sharkara* (unrefined sugar). But the sugar was in the shop which had been locked up for the night. Kochunny was asked to go to the place, and to give the *Sharkara* to the man. Kochunny forgot to take the key. But he entered the shop by means of an acrobatic feat. The building was four-square, with a big yard in the centre. The outside doors were locked, but the inside ones were not. Kochunny must have jumped over the building, got into the yard, and taken the goods.

This feat disturbed the merchant very much. He knew that so long as Kochunny was about, there was no safety for his shop. So more in sorrow than in anger, he asked Kochunny to leave his service.

With much grief in his heart he left his master's service and became a robber. But he was also very kind to the poor and the needy. He would help them with money and goods. But he had no compunction in robbing the rich, especially the wealthy misers of the land. He became the leader of a gang of robbers.

KOCHUNNY AND THE LANDLORD

ONCE Kochunny went to a rich landlord and asked him for a loan of a big quantity of paddy. The man refused and Kochunny decided to teach him a lesson.

But the landlord was equal to the occasion. He was afraid of Kochunny, and kept armed guards at his house. He himself slept on the front verandah with his wife and children because the weather was very hot at that time.

One night Kochunny came with his minions. While Kochunny remained outside, his companions quietly made a hole in the back wall of the house



and got in. They opened the jewellery box and took valuables from it. But somehow, the guards heard a noise, and came to know that thieves had got in. So they also went into the house and tried to find the burglars, but the latter hid themselves in the rooms. It was certain, however, that they could not escape.

Suddenly the children cried. They had been left alone as their father and mother were also inside the house. Kochunny who saw the situation had taken them and thrown them into the wet field close by.

Everybody ran to rescue the children; they took them up and returned to the house.

In the meantime the robbers had left the place with an enormous amount of booty.

KOCHUNNY AND THE MONEY-LENDER

THERE was a rich miser, a Nair who belonged to Kecerikkad, which was Kochunny's native place.

This gentleman was afraid of robbers, and built a very strong house of granite stones. He boasted that no thief, not even Kochunny, would be able to get into his house. These words reached our hero. He decided to teach the man a lesson.

One day, one Krishna Kurup came to the above mentioned Nair, and asked for a loan of one thousand rupees. He had brought about rupees two thousand worth of gold as security. Without any hesitation, the Nair gave him the money. Kochunny came to know about this transaction.

One evening the Nair went to the river side for a bath after rubbing his body with medicated oil, as is usual with Malayalese. He came back later and handed over to his wife a heavy bag saying, "Put this money into our box. That man Krishna Kurup who borrowed one thousand rupees from me two months back has returned the money. You give me the jewellery he pledged after putting this bag into the box." His wife did as she was told. He took the jewellery with him to return it to the owner who, he said, was waiting at the bathing ghat.

About a month later, Krishna Kurup himself came. He had brought the amount with interest

and asked the Nair for his jewellery. The latter called his wife. "Krishna Kurup has brought the money I lent him," he said; "take the jewellery out of my strong box and give it to him."

That good lady stared. "Why, it was one month back that you took it yourself and returned it to him. Don't you remember?" she asked.

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked her husband.

She tried to remind him of what had happened. But he said, she must have dreamt the whole thing. "No, no. Why, you gave me a bag saying that it contained the money; I will bring it to you." So she brought out the bag; when they opened it, it was full of stones!

The husband and wife could not understand who had done the trick. They were grieved over their loss, but the Nair promised to pay to Krishna Kurup the price of the jewellery.

Some days later, a Muslim gentleman came there. It was Kochunny himself. He gave the Nair the jewellery and told him: "Do not boast again that Kochunny cannot enter a strong house. I need not enter a house in order to get things from there."

The truth was that Kochunny knew the art of camouflage. He could 'fake' anybody. Of course, the fact that it was night and the Nair's wife could not have seen him clearly must have helped him.

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KOCHUNNY'S ESCAPE FROM PRISON AND HIS END

KOCHUNNY had a weakness for women. He was married, but lived an evil life. A Sudra woman was his concubine. There was some trouble over this, and ultimately Kochunny committed a murder, or rather, a culpable homicide. His wife's mother and he quarrelled over the matter of the Sudra woman, and in a sudden fit of anger, he beat the old lady with a big rod, and she died.

Kochunny ran away fearing the police. But the magistrate of the place received strict orders from the government that Kochunny should be apprehended. So the officer tried a clever ruse and succeeded. He promised the Sudra woman, with whom the culprit was intimate, that he would marry her himself if she would help him to arrest Kochunny.

So Kochunny was given by his concubine some sleeping dose with his food. That lady probably wanted to be on the side of justice. Besides, it was a more covetable thing to be a magistrate's wife than to be concubine to a wretched fugitive. Kochunny took the sleeping dose mixed with food and slept soundly.

The police came and loaded him with chains and locked him up. In the morning he understood what his "beloved Sudra woman" had done.

But the next night he somehow contrived to break his chains and got out of the lock-up. His first act was to go to his concubine's house. There he saw a man with her. He killed both of them and left the place. Then he went to his wife's house and made his peace with her. Never again did he prove unfaithful to that lady.

He then began law-breaking on a grand scale. For about ten years life in the land became insecure because he and his robber gang were always about and no one could travel in safety.

The government decided to put an end to this terrible scourge. They ordered the Tehsildar of Karthikappally to arrest Kochunny by fair means or foul.

The Tehsildar approached a few of Kochunny's friends and promised them rich rewards. One of them managed to give him a sleeping dose. He was put in chains and sent to Trivandrum for trial. Had he been tried, he would no doubt have been hanged. But this did not happen. He died in jail and escaped capital punishment.

A GREAT ACTOR

IN Kerala, there is the famous art of *Kathakali*, which is really action by pantomime. No words are spoken. Once there was an actor well-versed in this art, who was known as the Chakiar of Ammannoor. Ammannoor was his native place, and his name was Parameswaran. His feats are still talked about. The following is said to be a true incident.

The Chakiar often used to go to Trivandrum, being a favourite of the Maharajah. On one such visit he took a walk on the beach. The British Resident and his wife also came there with their pet dog. The dog ran towards the Chakiar, as if to bite him. But the Resident knew that he would do no such thing. The dog bit no one unless he was told to do so by his master. The Chakiar, however, was frightened, and put up an act. He took a stone and made the movements of throwing it at the dog. The dog went away howling.

The Resident was very angry. But the Chakiar assured him that he had done nothing to hurt the dog. He had thrown no stone. It was only a bit of a make-believe. "But the dog howled," said the English man.

"Sir, he thought he was hurt", replied our hero.

"Nonsense!" said the Resident. "You say that the dog thought he was hurt? That is a good one."
"Yes, Sir," said the Chakiar.

The Resident did not believe him. On being told that the man was a protege of His Highness, the Maharajah, he went and complained to the Maharajah.

It was not good in those days to offend the representative of the Paramount Power. So the Maharajah sent for the Chakiar and asked him what he had done. The latter assured him that he had done no injury to the dog. "But the Sahib is not convinced," said His Highness. "I think I can convince him," said the actor. So saying, he took a big stone and made movements with his hands and eyes and suddenly seemed to let the stone fall on the Resident's head. The latter almost fell down and thought he was terribly hurt. It was some time before he regained his consciousness.

When he came to his sense he found that he was not injured at all. He was greatly surprised and was full of admiration for the wonderful actor. "I have seen many actors in my own country," he said, "but I have never seen one like you."

THE ORIGIN OF CERTAIN CASTES AND TRIBES IN KERALA

The Story of Vararuchi

THE great King Vikramaditya had many fine scholars at his court. Vararuchi, who was a learned Brahmin, was the chief among them. One day the king asked him, "Tell me now, which is the finest verse in the Ramayana."

Vararuchi was at a loss. How could he choose one verse among so many excellent verses? The King, with the usual unreasonableness of royalty, said, "Unless you can give me the answer, you need not come to this court."

Vararuchi began his wanderings. He met great scholars and asked them the same question. But he was none the wiser for all his efforts.

Weary and dispirited, he laid himself down under a peepal tree in a forest which was said to be haunted. He prayed to the gods to keep him safe.

The peepal tree was the abode of evil spirits. They used to drink human blood, especially of women during confinement. During the night he heard a conversation among the spirits on the tree. A few had come from a village nearby. "There is a woman in the village nearing her confinement," the newcomers said. "If you want a feast come."

But the spirits on the tree declined. "We have to keep watch here," they said. "A great Brahmin scholar is sleeping under this tree. You come back and tell us all the news."

At about midnight the spirits returned. They said, "It was a Paraya woman and she delivered a girl. That girl will be married to a Brahmin whose name is Vararuchi. He is a great scholar, but he does not know the most excellent verse in the Ramayana." Saying this they recited the verse.

Vararuchi was happy that his quest was over. He knew the verse now. But to be married to a Paraya girl : Oh ! that was indeed terrible. Something must be done about it and speedily.

So he went back to the court and repeated to the king the verse he had wanted so much to hear. The king was happy. But he also warned him, "O King! A grave danger is threatening Your Majesty. There is a Chandala girl born in your kingdom who will bring ruin upon the land."

The King knew that Vararuchi was a great scholar and astrologer. So he lost no time in sending his servants to find the girl. He ordered that the baby should be put on a very small raft and floated down the river, with a candle fixed on its head.

After some years, Vararuchi left the King's court and wandered all over the land. One night he was the guest of a Brahmin gentleman who knew about him and received him with great honour. He invited Vararuchi to dinner, but the latter said, "There are some conditions to be fulfilled before I take my food. First, I must have *veervalli pattu* (a kind of soft silk) to put on after my bath. Second,

one hundred persons must be fed before I eat. Third, I must have 108 curries for my dinner. Fourth, I must eat three people after taking food. Fifth, four people must carry me afterwards."

The host felt that these were impossible conditions. But he had a very wise daughter who said, "Father, don't be worried. We can do what he wants."

"How is it possible, my daughter?" he asked.

"Don't you see father that he is merely using figurative language? He wants *vecarvali patta* to wear. He is referring to his underwear which need only be of ordinary cloth. He has to feed 100 people. That means only that he must perform the ceremony of *Vysiam*, which will please hundred gods. For this *Vysiam*, we have to supply some sandal wood, some flowers, etc. nothing very hard to get."

"He says that after taking food, he must eat three people."

"He is merely referring to *pansupari*, which consists of three things, betel leaf, arecanut and lime", said the girl.

"He says that four people should carry him. What does he mean by that?"

"Oh, that ! That means only that he should sleep on a cot with four legs."

Is that all? I will tell him that we will fulfil his conditions. You are indeed a blessing to me, my daughter !

So Vararuchi was informed that he could have all that he wanted. He wished to know how his host had managed to find out his meaning. "I have a very clever daughter who understood your meaning," said the Brahmin.

Vararuchi decided that he should marry that wonderful girl. Her father was very happy to give his daughter to so learned a man. So he married her, and took her to his own home.

One day, Vararuchi combed the lovely hair of his wife. He found a healed wound on her head. "What is this, my love?" he asked.

"Oh that ! There is a story connected with it. You see I am not the Brahmin's daughter. My parents, for reasons best known to them, put me on a small raft, set a candle on my head, and floated me down the river. This mark is of the nail with which they fixed the candle on my head. That Brahmin saved me and brought me up as his own child."

Vararuchi then knew that no one could escape one's destiny. He had married a Paraya girl after all.

So he left Vikramaditya's land and wandered south and came to Kerala.

His wife conceived, and he asked her to have her confinement in the forest. When she informed him of the child's birth, he asked, "Has the child a mouth?" "Yes," replied his wife. "Then leave him in the forest. The God who gave him a mouth, will give him food also! (This is a usual saying among Malayalis). The wife obeyed him, and left the child in the forest.

This same question, Vararuchi asked her every time a baby was born to her, and being answered in the affirmative, the infant was left in the forest.

The mother did not wish to lose all her children. So, when the twelfth child was born, she told her husband, "He has no mouth." And when the baby was brought to his father, it had no mouth! The mother was such a loving and faithful wife that even her lie became truth! The father's prophecy also became true. All the children survived; no one died of starvation. The last one, who had no mouth, became a god, and is known as 'Vayillakkun nilappen' i.e., the mouthless god on the hill.

The first child was called 'Melatthol Agnihothri, since he was brought up by a Namboodiri Brahmin of the Agnihothri family. The second son was the famous 'Naranathu Bhuranthan', i.e. the madman of Naranathu. The next became a princess, and was known as "Karakkalamma." The next, who was named Akavoor Chatthan, became a physician. The next was named Vaduthalanair. The sixth was called Uppucottan. The next, Rajakan, was a washerman. The next, Perunthachen, was a carpenter. Another son, Valluvan, became a weaver. The tenth, Pananar, was a tailor, and the next, Pakkanar, was a Paraya.

These eleven are believed to be the founders of many different castes in Kerala. They are all said to be really the *Avathars* of Mahavishnu. This is how it was discovered:

In course of time, they all came to know each other. After their father's death, they had got together at their eldest brother Agnihothri's house. It was the Shraddha ceremony of the father.

Agnihothri's wife, who was a Namboodiri woman, of very high caste, did not like to have them all in her house. But her husband took her to the rooms in which his brothers were sleeping. And when she looked at them, she saw that each of them had the divine signs of Mahavishnu on him.

There are very interesting and well-known stories connected with these brothers, especially about Naranathu Bhuranthan. One of these is the theme of the next story.

NARANATHU BHRANTHAN

NARANATHU Bhranthan, is probably the best known and most interesting character among the sons of Vararuchi. The word Bhranthan means "Madman", and it could not be denied that he was a very queer person. Still, he had divine gifts.

His one amusement was to take big stones to the top of a mountain and see them roll down. He went about begging for his food. When night came, he would boil the rice he had got by begging, and eat and sleep wherever he found himself.

One evening, he was in a cremation ground, which people usually avoided. But he did not know what fear was. Quietly, he began to cook his food.

In the night, the terrible goddess Bhadrakali and her minions came to the place. They began to dance and make noise. Then they saw Naranathu Bhranthan.

"You must get away," the goddess told him.

Naranathu Bhranthan was surprised. "Why should I get away," he asked. "You just mind your business, and I will mind mine," he said.

"When we dance, no one should see us."

"There is plenty of space here. You have your dance."

"No, you must go. I will not allow you to be here."

"Oh! And why should I take orders from you, if I might be so bold as to ask? Am I your slave?" asked Naranathu Bhranthan.

"No, but I will see that you go."

"You may try."

The goddess then made a determined effort to frighten him. She looked very frightful. So did the other spirits with her. They howled and rushed at him. But he looked at their antics with a smile of amusement.

At last the goddess found that this was no ordinary man. She gave up her efforts to frighten him. Finally she said, "If I meet a man, I must either bless him or curse him. I will give you a blessing. What would you have?"

"Nothing. Only leave me in peace."

"No, no, you must ask me some blessing."

"Then you increase my life's allotted span by a single day."

"That I cannot do."

"Then you reduce it by a single day."

"That also is beyond my power."

“Oh! then you cannot do anything really.”

“You ask for some other blessing.”

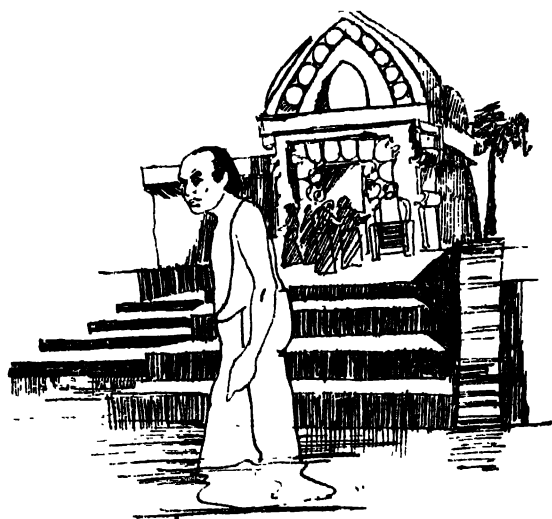
“Oh, bother ! You will not leave me alone. If you are very particular, do one thing. I have elephantiasis on my left foot. Transfer it to my right foot.”

The goddess did this, and left him in peace.

THE BIRTH OF A GREAT POET

KUNJAN Nambiyar is the most popular poet of Kerala. Every Malayali who has even a little education must have read at least one poem of his. For simplicity and humour, he is unequalled.

There is a bit of folklore about his birth, which is very interesting. A very poor Namboodiri Brahmin was going about collecting money from friends and sympathisers with the object of marrying off his daughters. He came to a village in Kerala, where there was a temple. He went to the temple tank, and had his bath there. Before he got into the water, he left his purse containing the money he had collected on the bank. After his bath when he came and looked for his purse, it was nowhere to be found. He was very sad, because he had lost all his money.



He tried to find the purse, and made inquiries about it. He went to the temple boarding-house and had his food there. (Every Brahmin could have free food in the Kerala temples.)

With a heavy heart, he left the place. Next year also he came there and tried to collect some money. The *Shanthikkarna* that is the officiating priest took him to his house. He mentioned to him about the loss of his purse the previous year.

The priest's wife brought out a purse. "Is this your grace's purse?" she asked. The Namboodiri looked eagerly at it and said, "Yes, how did you get it?"

"Your grace," she said, "left it on the bank of the pool in which you bathed. A cow came and dropped its dung over it, and so you could not find it. I happened to see it later. I have kept it for you."

The Namboodiri opened the purse and counted the money. Not a pie was missing.

"You must take half of this," he said to the lady. "You have kept it with great care."

"No, not on any account," she replied.

The Namboodiri was so pleased that he gave her a blessing. "Next year, you will have a baby. He will be a very great man," he said.

The next year, the great poet Kunjan Nambiar was born to that lady.

THE STORY OF THE THIRUVALOOR TEMPLE

THIS temple, near Alwaye town, has a very interesting legend connected with it.

Once upon a time, two Namboodiris were going to the Pooram Festival at Trichur. On the way they met two lovely maidens of the Sudra caste who invited them to their house. The girls warned them against passing that way at night, as they had to cross a place haunted by Yakshis. These evil beings, who look like beautiful young women, lure men to their dwellings and then change into fearful creatures who drink human blood. The two Namboodiris decided to listen to their advice. Besides, the two girls looked so lovely. Why should they not spend a very pleasant night with them?

So they went with them, and were given rooms to sleep in. They laid themselves down, and the beautiful girls came to them. They were really two terrible Yakshis. One of the two Brahmins was killed and eaten that night. The other had a Vedic Book with him, and so the other Yakshi found herself powerless.

In the morning, he found himself on the top of a very tall palm tree (Yakshis are usually believed to live on the top of palm trees.) The hair and nails of the poor Namboodiri who had lost his life were seen at the foot of another tree.

When the story became known, the son of the dead Namboodiri swore vengeance against the evil

spirit. He became very proficient in black magic and managed to get hold of the Yakshi who had eaten up his father. "If you kill me, you will die a terrible death," she said.

The Namboodiri did not relent. He sacrificed the offending Yakshi on an altar. Later on, her husband, who was a Gandharva, was also caught by him. The Gandharva had caused much trouble to the Rani of the then King of Kerala. He had 'possessed' her and would not leave. But the King secured the services of the Namboodiri, and he tried to drive out the evil spirit. He had recourse to many terrible '*homams*', such as burning a large number of ants and other innocent creatures—things which are unlawful for a Brahmin to do.

At last the Gandharva appeared and begged the Namboodiri not to drive him out. But the latter insisted, and the Gandharva put a curse on our hero. It was the same curse as was pronounced by his wife, the Yakshi. "But if you go and worship at the Thiruvallur Temple, my curse will not touch you," said the Gandharva before he left.

The Namboodiri accordingly went to the Thiruvallur temple. But he died a terrible death there, contrary to what the Gandharva had said. Probably he had done too much evil, killing innocent creatures.

He died the 'wheeling death', that is, his body went round and round, trying to breathe. In his agony he bit the rafters of the temple, and it is said that the marks of his teeth are even now seen on them.

THE THIRU-ONAM FESTIVAL

THIS festival is a very important one. and takes place in the month of Chingam (August 15th to September 15th), which is the first month of the Malabar year. It is the one festival in which all Malyalis join, without distinction of caste or creed. There is an interesting legend connected with it.

Once upon a time, Kerala was ruled by the Asura, Mahabali. It was a period of great prosperity and goodwill. Everybody was happy and contented. There was no injustice, or exploitation of the poor by the rich. In fact, nobody was poor at that time.

Now, the Devas (the gods) have no love for Asuras. They were all very jealous of the popularity of Mahabali. If it went on like this they would have no place in men's minds and nobody would worship them. So they approached Mahavishnu and told him of their fear. "I will look into the matter," said the Great God.

Mahavishnu took the form of a young Brahmin boy, whose name was Vamanan, and came to the earth. He approached Mahabali, who received him kindly and with respect. He had always respected Brahmins. "What can I do for you ?" he asked Vamanan.

"I want only three feet of earth."

"Three feet of earth ? What good will that do ?"

"I want to sit there and worship God," said the boy. "I will certainly give you what you ask," said Mahabali. The King's Guru, Sukramuni, called him aside. "Mind what you do !" he said. "This is no Brahmin boy, but Mahavishnu himself come to destroy you."

But Mahabali would not go back on his word. He asked the boy to take three feet of earth, from wherever he liked.

Suddenly the boy grew up and became a very great giant. With one foot he measured the whole earth. With another he measured the underworld.

"Now where can I get the third foot ?" he asked "Here." said the King, and bowed his head. Vamanan put his foot on Mahabali's head and pushed him down to hell !

But before the good King went down, he asked for a boon. "Allow me to visit my people once a year," he begged. This request was granted by Mahavishnu.

So he comes every year, on the Thiru-Onam day, and visits Kerala. All people rejoice on that day. It is the great festival of the year for all Malayalis.

A GREAT POET WHO WAS BORN A FOOL

THE Rajah of Kottayam, a place which is in the northern-most part of Kerala, was a great poet, and his works are well known. But it is said that when he was young he was so dull that it was difficult even to teach him to read. This was a cause of great grief to his mother, who was then ruling the state, and was a very learned lady herself. The prince was the only son, and heir to the throne.

The great king of Kozhikode (the Zamorin) died. As a neighbouring ruler it was incumbent on the Rani of Kottayam to send a condolence message and to offer any aid necessary to conduct the usual ceremonies. But who was to take the message ? The new prince of Kozhikode was a very learned man and a great Sanskrit scholar. Only a member of the royal family could take the message. At last the Rani hit upon a plan. She would send the young prince and also a number of scholars with him. He will ask a single question. The scholars will listen to the reply and report it to the Rani.

So the prince was taught to say, *Mayaa Kim Karthavyam* ? (i. e. what should I do ?). He was to convey the idea that he would do anything necessary in the circumstances. For this, this simple Sanskrit sentence of three words was all that was needed.

But as ill-luck would have it, the prince was not able to ask the question correctly. He said, "*Maya kim karthavyam*". The learned prince replied with intense scorn, *Deerghocharanam karthavyam*" (i.e. prolonging the last syllable is what you should do)

The scholars who went with him hung their heads in shame. They returned and told the Rani what had happened, and she was stricken with grief, and rage. What should she do to this good-for-nothing fellow, who has brought such shame on the royal family? She decided to throw him into the sacred stream "*Kumararadhara*". The water was very cold, and usually death followed in less than twenty-four hours. But if he survived, he would become a great scholar. Such was the power of that stream.

Anyhow, the prince was tied hand and foot, and thrown into the place, where there was a water-fall. He lay there, and soon became unconscious.

After twenty-four hours, they went and looked for him. They took him to be dead. But his heart was still beating faintly! They rubbed his body and applied warmth, and slowly he recovered consciousness. It is said that his first words were beautiful poetry. The Rani's joy knew no bounds. The prince was given tuition by great scholars, and he soon mastered Sanskrit.

He wrote a number of great poems.

THE JAR WITH THE MOUTH WHICH IS AWRY

The Chinese jar with the awry mouth is well known as a marvellous object in Kerala. There is an interesting story connected with it.

Long ago, a Chinese merchant was ship wrecked near the Kerala coast. Most of the cargo in the ship was lost, but he was able to save ten big Chinese jars. With these he reached a poor Brahmin's house. He told his sad story and the Brahmin, who himself had very little to eat, gave him some food. He begged the Brahmin to take care of his ten jars, until he returned. "There is only *dhal* in those jars," he said and left the place.

The Brahmin promised to take care of the jars, and the Chinaman left. Days passed. The poor Brahmin had many children, whose stomachs were almost always empty. One day they were crying for food. "Why not take a little of the *dhal* in those jars?" asked his wife.

The Brahmin, much against his will, consented to this, they opened one jar and took out the *dhal*, but there was something shining underneath. They looked, and found a very large quantity of gold coins? The Brahmin and his wife were astonished.

Later on, they began to use the gold, no doubt with the intention of replacing what they took. In course of time, they became very rich by using the gold coins, and were able to replace them too.

After some years, the Chinese merchant returned and asked for the jars. The Brahmin confessed the truth. "But you don't lose a pie. I have replaced it all," he said. He offered also interest. "Interest?" asked the Chinaman. "I will take no interest from you. You saved my life and took care of my goods."

With many assurances of goodwill on both sides, they parted. But as a token of his gratitude, he left the awry-mouthed jar with the Brahmin. It is said to be a very remarkable jar. The taste of the salted mangoes kept in it has become a by-word in Kerala.

HOW THE EVIL POWER OF THE STARS WAS AVERTED

ONCE upon a time there lived a Namboodiri Brahmin boy, in a village in Kerala. He had heard from his parents that his life would be very short. He had been a gift of the gods, because it was as a result of much prayer and good works that he was born. But learned astrologers predicted at his birth that he would die of snake-bite in his twentieth year.

The boy himself was a very resourceful person. He knew that an evil destiny could be averted by prayer and good works. He decided to try his best to conquer the evil power of the stars, by a life of devotion.

From North Malabar, he travelled down to Central Travancore, to the famous Aranmula Temple and prayed to the deity there. He did not, however fail to pray in a large number of other temples on the way. But the Aranmula god was specially chosen by him because of his great power. He remained there for a number of days, daily offering prayers to the god. On the forty-first he had a vision. He saw a messenger of God, who told him that he should pray to Lord Siva. He was to go to the temple of Siva, in South Travancore, at a place known as Kottarakara, and continue his devotions there.

Accordingly, he went to Kottarakara and regularly offered his prayers there to the Lord Siva. On the fortieth day a terrible event occurred.

When he was going to bathe in the temple pool, suddenly a serpent appeared. It was coming to bite him. He went into the pool and had his bath. When he got out, the fast-moving reptile reached him, and was about to bite. But the young man concentrated his mind on the god, and prayed for deliverance. Suddenly a big kite appeared and carried off the serpent in its beak !

The young man offered his praises to the god Siva for his deliverance. He returned home and told his parents the happy news, and their joy knew no bounds.

But he himself was not satisfied. He went again to Kottarakara and repaired the temple there, and built a fine cow-house in that compound, almost entirely of granite. Even the roof is paved with granite stones. It still stands there, as a lasting monument of his gratitude to the Lord Siva.

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THE GIRL WHO LOVED HER GOD MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE

THERE is a very important temple at Thripoonithura, near Ernakulam. A girl was born to a Namboodiri, at Udayamperoor, near this place.

She grew up to be a very pious girl. Her mind was concentrated upon God, as revealed in the Thripoonithura Temple. She regularly went there and spent her days in worship.

But there came a time when she had to be married. She dreaded marriage because it would deprive her of the sight of the god whom she loved.

So she prayed earnestly to be saved from marriage, so that she might be near to the god all her life. She would die rather than miss worshipping the deity. "Oh Lord keep me near you. Do not let me be taken away elsewhere", she prayed.

Then she heard a voice calling her to the inner chamber of the temple, where the image was. She went near the deity. Then the god stretched forth and embraced her, and she was seen no more. The god had taken her to himself, and she had become one with him. Her ornaments were found later on in front of the image, and people guessed what had happen.

In the month of Kumbhom, that is, February-March, this event is celebrated by the local people. The god is taken in procession to a Namboodiri's house, and a great feast is held there in memory of this remarkable girl.

